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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KOMNENIAN ARMY 1081-1180

BY

JOHN W. BIRKENMEIER



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To My Mother and Father

For their love, encouragement and support

Throughout my studies

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PREFACE

This work grew out of a fascination with the military society of the Komnenian Emperors. It seemed almost miraculous that the Byzantine Empire managed to survive the destruction of its army at Manzikert (1071) and the military collapse that followed. How did the empire recover so many lost territories, pursue aggressive military policies, and flourish economically? Furthermore, the Komnenian period is rich in historical documents; historians and orators loved to praise or vilify the Komnenian emperors. These sources are engaging, and if examined together provide a clear picture of Komnenian military policy, goals, and army structure.

Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), John II (1118–1143), and Manuel I (1143–1180) restored the political and military fortunes of the Byzantine state. This included rebuilding the army under Alexios, who simultaneously parried invasions of Normans from the west, Seljuk Turks from the east, and Pecheneg and Cuman raiders from the north. John extended the empire's borders in Asia Minor, laying siege to dozens of cities and attempting to control the crusader states in the Levant. Manuel further extended Byzantine military operations, personally campaigning in Serbia, Hungary, and in Syria. He also launched large expeditions under subordinate commanders that attacked Egypt and the Norman Kingdom in Italy. Finally, he twice gathered the formidable Byzantine siege train and attempted to destroy Ikonion, capital of the Byzantines' greatest foe in the east, the Seljuk Turks.

The goal of this study is to examine the restoration and use of the Komnenian army: how, and with what resources the Komnenian emperors restored the Byzantine military position in the Balkans, Asia Minor, and the Levant. We will examine the army as an institution, considering how Alexios rebuilt it, and how John and Manuel modified it. We will examine the Komnenian campaigns, looking for patterns that might shed light on Byzantine military and political policy. We will observe how the army was supported, and how the Byzantine army conducted its most characteristic activity—the siege. It is my hope that these topics and questions will provide a basis for further inquiry into the nature of Komnenian society; how the

empire was preserved in an era of increasingly complicated interstate relations.

The military system that had provided the empire's defense between the eighth and the late eleventh centuries was destroyed before Alexios came to power. Alexios spent twenty years developing a new army, one that was composed of native Byzantine soldiery, albeit always with several mercenary contingents. The native soldiers came from Thrace, Macedonia, and Thessaly, which replaced the empire's Asia Minor recruiting grounds. By the end of Manuel's reign the Asia Minor coastlands and western provinces were filled with military colonies, districts, and fortified enclaves; these provided a new defensive system against the empire's Turkish enemies. This structure was not as resilient as had been the earlier system of large provincial armies and defense in depth. However, it was as effective as could be managed with the resources available to the Komnenian emperors.

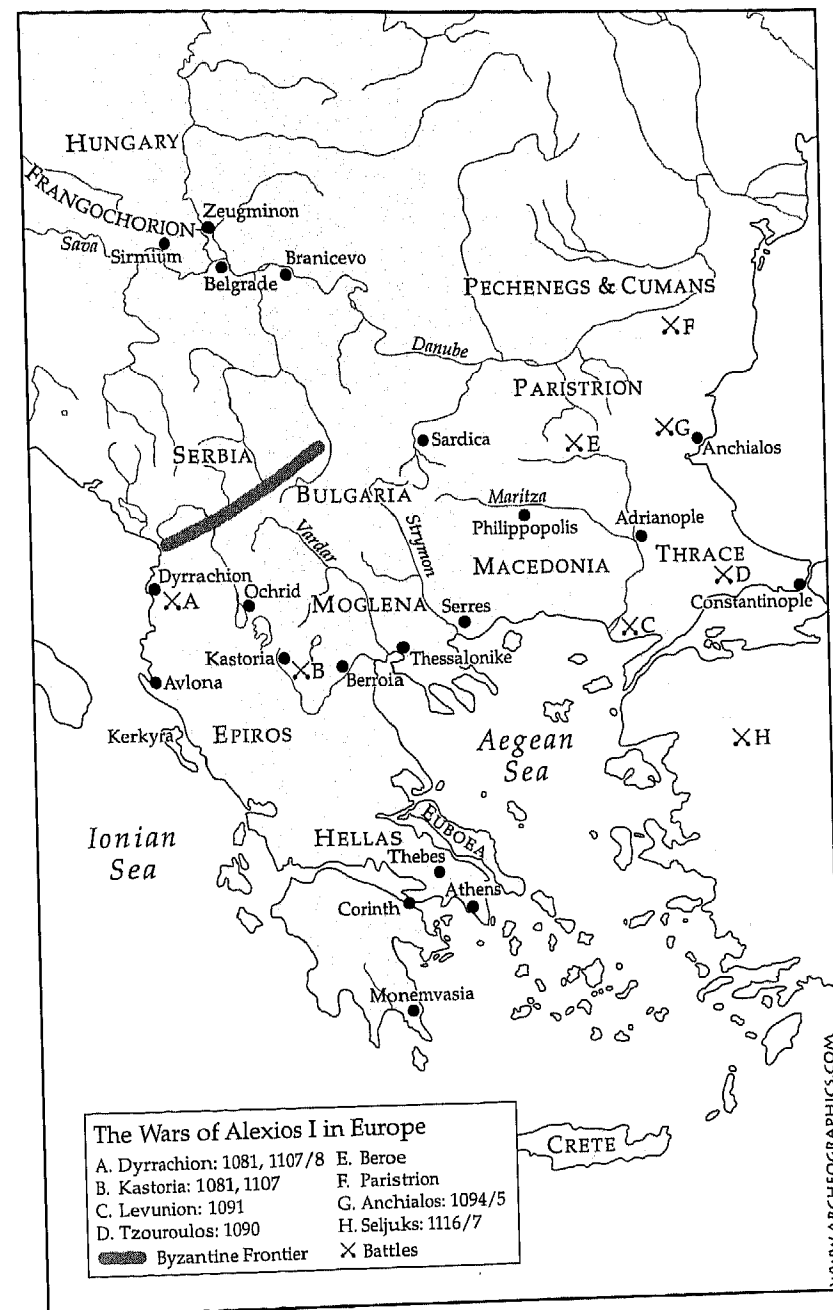
Historians frequently place great importance upon field battles, which occurred when armies lined up their cavalry and charged each other. Despite the prominence of such accounts in our sources (and in the secondary literature), close examination of eleventh and twelfth century texts and oratorical sources provide a different picture. Successful Komnenian warfare was marked by aggressive military campaigns culminating in sieges, followed by defensive warfare and diplomacy to preserve gains. Open battles, even important clashes like Myriokephalon (1176), were not desired. The army existed to protect the siege engines and transport them to their destination. There, they would crush the enemy's walls (as well as the interior, civilian, buildings), and enable the imperial soldiers to storm the burning and demoralized city. Field battles were avoided because they were uncertain affairs, a fact that both emperors and their chroniclers recognized.

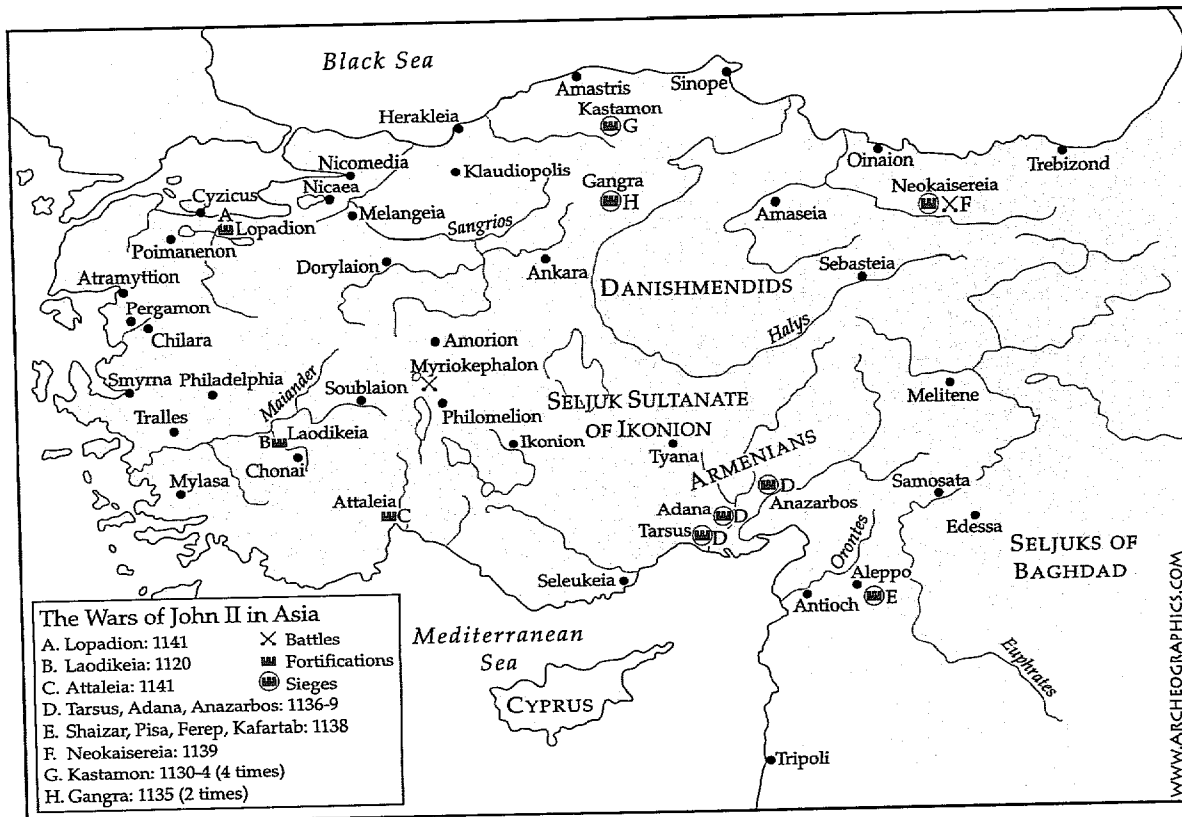
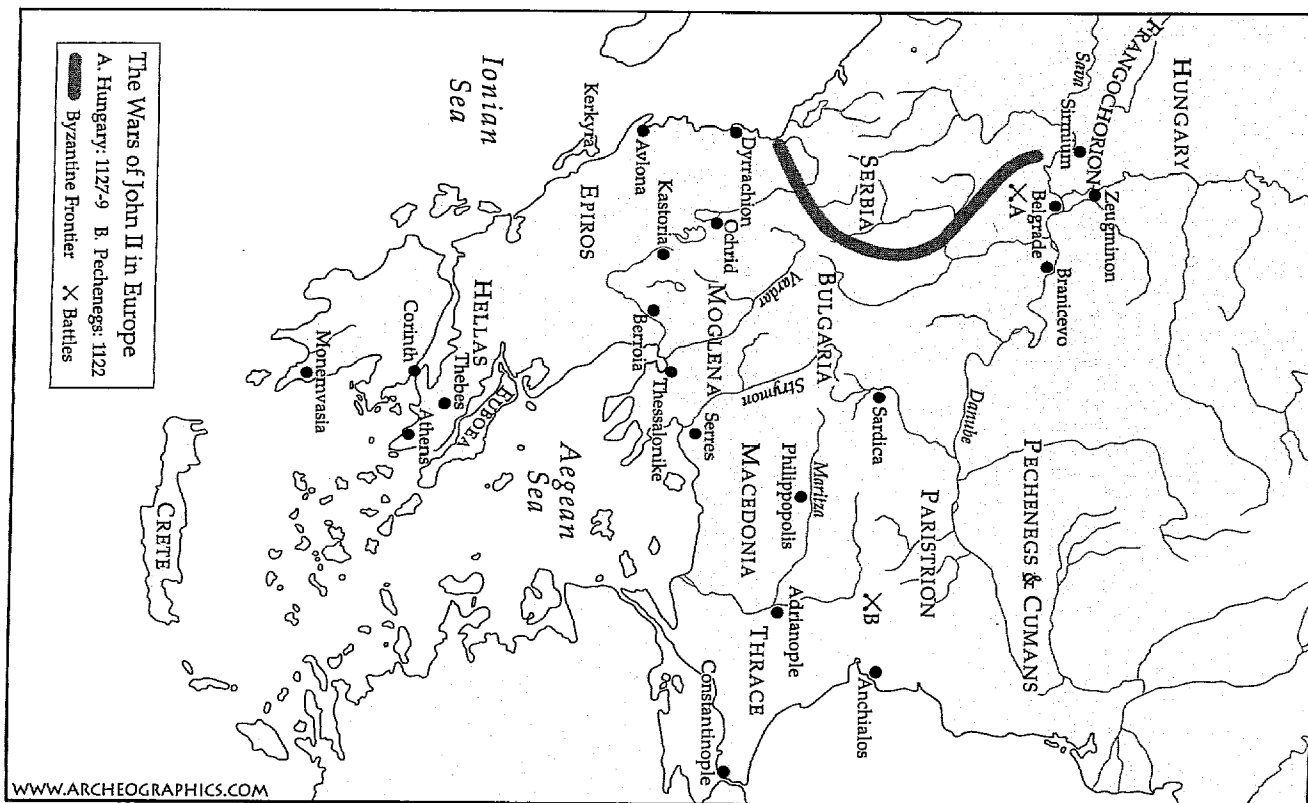
Alexios, John, and Manuel each developed military strategies for their differing goals. These goals did not (generally) include the reconquest of central Asia Minor. Alexios and John were more often than not successful in their military operations. Manuel's military operations were not as successful. There were inherent limitations to medieval military operations. Defensive operations (whether between armies, or in defense of cities) usually held a considerable advantage. This explains why the Komnenian emperors were both unwilling and unable to reassert control over the lost heartland of Asia

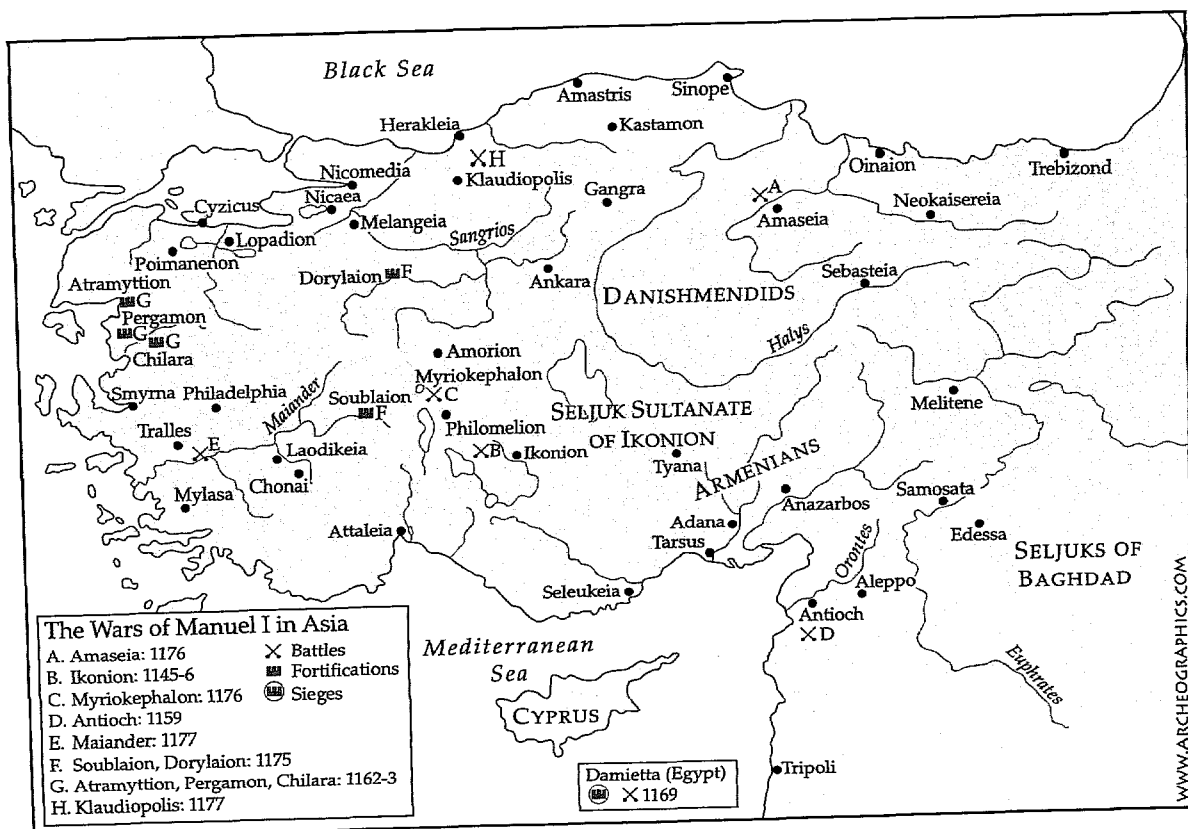
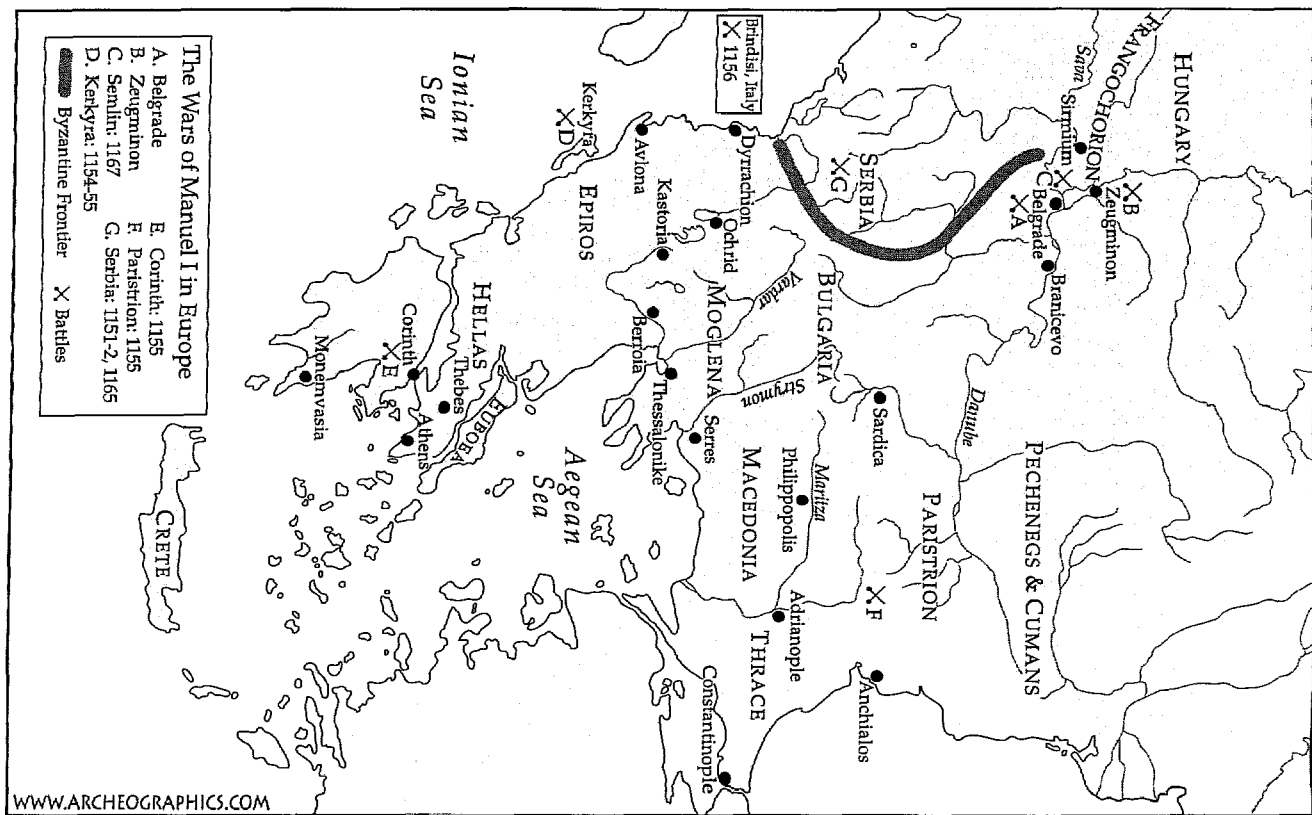
Minor. It also demonstrates why ostensibly friendly crusading armies were so dangerous to the Byzantine state (and were clearly perceived as such by the Byzantines). Supporting them meant allowing them past all defensive perimeters, fortifications and armies. This was antithetical to the basic strategy of the Komnenian emperors, which was to fight enemies at the frontier, using fortifications and terrain to delay them until disease and fatigue weakened their fighting capabilities. Imperfect hindsight can lead us to see this fear (particularly during the first crusade) as a bit paranoid. However, this attitude, as with other military problems, reflected a realistic and finely tuned Byzantine perception of military threats and strategic necessities.

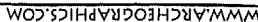
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TEXTUAL SOURCES FOR 12TH- AND 13TH-CENTURY HISTORY

The goal of this study is to understand the fighting capability of the Komnenian army, how it was maintained, and how it replenished its manpower. Ideally the military historian seeks sources that provide detailed tactical and strategic information about the army and its campaigns. With one exception Komnenian battle accounts were not written by soldiers but by imperial secretaries, civil officials, and relatives of emperors. There is no Komnenian *Strategikon*, the seventh-century Byzantine military manual that provides much of our information for the army of that period. Historians of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries wrote to glorify or criticize emperors, to promote their own interests, or perhaps simply to ask why God permitted so many calamities to befall His people. Nikephoros Bryennios is the only soldier among our sources; his *Historia* ends in 1079 with the rebellion of Nikephoros Botaneiates. This work lacks the polish and literary quality of other contemporary accounts, but his history describes military events precisely and cogently.¹ Although Michael Attaleiates was not a soldier, he was a military logothete in Romanos IV's army, and accompanied the army on the Manzikert

¹ Anna Komnene was married to the general and historian Nikephoros Bryennios.

campaign, where the Seljuk sultan Alp Arslan defeated the Byzantines. Attalciates' *Historia* describes Romanos' recruits and gives an account of how they performed during the campaign against the Seljuks. Michael Psellos, counselor to several emperors, was a skilled politician with access to imperial documents and to individuals who participated in the campaigns he describes, but he himself was not at the battle of Manzikert, nor at any of the other military events that he recounts in his *Chronographia*. Anna Komnene, daughter of Alexios I, offers a detailed description of military events during her father's reign, but her account is limited to Alexios' activities. She ignores the presence of Alexios' heir, her brother and enemy, the future emperor John II Komnenos. Ioannes Zonaras' *Epitome historion* is a chronicle of world history with little specific detail, although he offers a more balanced appraisal of Alexios than does Anna. John Kinnamos lived during Manuel's reign and served as the emperor's secretary, accompanying the emperor on his travels. Although Kinnamos frequently provides first-hand location descriptions, the reliability of his account is skewed by his obsequious praise of the Komnenian emperors, in particular of Manuel. Niketas Choniates (1155/7–1217) wrote his history in the late twelfth century, after Kinnamos' work was finished. He achieved high rank under Isaac II Angelos (1185–95), and wrote after the last Komnenian emperor, Andronikos I, was deposed (1185). Choniates completed his history after the sack of Constantinople in 1204. The major textual sources can be supplemented with a number of epistolographic and rhetorical authors. Eustathios of Thessalonike occasionally mentions details of weapons or military tactics, while Psellos' orations and the poems of Theodore Prodromos can be mined for useful fragments. Prodromos frequently refers to events that do not otherwise appear in sources written by Byzantine chroniclers. The following brief survey of the sources is designed to offer a concise guide to the problems and biases of the Byzantine sources for the Komnenian army.

She idolized her husband, although her father always receives the most abundant praise in *The Alexiad*. Anna relied upon Bryennios' history for much of Alexios' early reign.

The Authors

The *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene is the most important source for Alexios' reign. Written as an encomium, Anna's account of Alexios' military activities must therefore be examined with an understanding of her over-riding desire to glorify her father's deeds. Within this broad caveat, her description of military activity falls into two categories. First, many of Anna's accounts of events that occurred during her childhood or before her birth were taken nearly verbatim from the *Hyle Historia* of her husband, Nikephoros Bryennios. Her other descriptions, those she constructed, were developed from hearsay and from the reports of veterans.² Anna's benign plagiarism of her husband raises two questions: the chronology of events in her work, and her competence in describing military events. Byzantine chroniclers loved to write about events that glorified their heroes and were far less concerned with the actual tactics and equipment of the mass of men who participated in these campaigns. This tendency is naturally more pronounced when chroniclers wrote decades after events occurred, as did Anna. The *Alexiad* spans a broad chronology that includes Alexios' accession to the throne in 1081 (two years before Anna's birth), the First Crusade (1096), her father's death in 1118, and her failed coup against her brother, John II (1118–43), which resulted in her exile to a monastery. There she remained, unable to write until her brother died and her nephew, Manuel I (1143–80), obtained the throne. Many of the events that Anna describes occurred in the decade before she was born, and for these she places reliance on her husband's chronicle. Because Bryennios' history ends as Alexios' reign begins, Anna's description of the first twenty years of her father's reign was drawn from hearsay. She writes that these events were bandied about court as examples of the emperor's prowess. As one might expect, this court gossip influenced her perception of her father and his abilities.³ Furthermore, the 'veterans' Anna consulted,

² Anne Comnène, *Alexiade* (Paris, 1937–76), ed. B. Leih, II, 174–76. I will use the title *Alexiad* to refer to this work. Anna indicates that she obtained most of her information during Manuel's reign, but that she had often heard her father and George Palaiologos, one Alexios' most trusted generals, discuss battles.

³ *Alexiad*, II, 175. George Palaiologos directed the defense of Dyrrachion against Robert Guiscard, and he remained one of Alexios' most loyal supporters. Anna could have found few more informed sources than Palaiologos, although few less objective.

had they been active in the 1080s, would have been octogenarians in the 1140s. When examining Anna's account we should remember two things: even the last events of Alexios' reign, the Turkish campaign of 1117, took place twenty-five years earlier than the point at which Anna wrote about them, and that all of her military descriptions are derived from hearsay. She mentions that imperial documents were available to her, and the precision of her description of the Treaty of Devol appears to support this, but Anna seldom differentiates between incidents drawn from her memory, from hearsay, or from documents. Finally, we must remember that Anna Komnene did not witness any of the battles she describes, except for the arrival of the First Crusade and perhaps such skirmishes near Constantinople as could have been seen from the safety of the city's walls.

Anna selectively mined her husband's chronicle for accounts of events preceding Alexios' accession to the throne, and relied upon court gossip for the first twenty years of her father's reign. This still leaves us with a description of Alexios and the events of his reign based upon Anna's own dim memory and third-hand accounts. Precise descriptions of tactics, equipment, and men are particularly important to a study such as this one, but the limitations imposed by memory are compounded by Anna's tendency to glorify her father's actions to the detriment of accurate description. The military events of Alexios' pre-reign, as corroborated by Nikephoros' history, are described with precision and detail. They are marred only by Anna's focus on her father to the exclusion of other participants. Her tendency to indulge in hyperbole increases in direct proportion to her lack of detailed information. A good example of this is Alexios' defeat at Dyrrachion, where the Norman cavalry and infantry army of Robert Guiscard completely overwhelmed the Byzantine cavalry and drove them from the field. Anna recounts the emperor's escape from Dyrrachion upon a miraculous leaping horse,⁴ but we are left to guess what happened to Alexios' men. In battles where Alexios is present as an active participant, the common soldiers are merely supporting characters whose actions serve to highlight the

⁴ *Alexiade*, I, 164. Anna's leaping horse imagery is typical of her descriptions of the denouements of Alexios' battles. The more poorly Alexios fares in combat, the more compensatory glory his daughter felt obliged to create. Anna spends two chapters describing the battle and another two describing Alexios' "glorious" flight.

emperor's courage and perspicacity; they disappear once Alexios' retreat moves the action away from the battlefield.

Alongside the topos of the miraculous, Anna also employs the topos of the emperor's cleverness. The best example of this is Anna's muddled description of the "new formation" supposedly employed by her father on his last Turkish campaign. This account provides no practical information that would distinguish the formation from an ordinary phalanx: what made it new, presumably, was Anna's lack of understanding.⁵ The only novelty of the 1117 campaign was that Alexios' men were well disciplined and followed orders during a difficult retreat.

Anna also wrote to cast aspersions upon the motives and characters of Alexios' opponents, and this purpose permeates her account of events, along with more traditional Byzantine prejudices noted by Gyula Moravcsik, such as dislike of westerners and a lack of understanding of Islam.⁶ Anna argues that the laws of history prevented her from interpolating her own opinions and biases into her history, but her truth is often skewed.⁷ This habit is particularly in evidence when she ignores her brother, the future emperor John II. John was an adult for the last decade of Alexios' reign (1108-18), but Anna omits any substantive mention of Alexios' successor, who appears occasionally in treaties she transcribes, but who never takes any praiseworthy action. Anna states that John left Alexios' death-bed and hurried to the Imperial Palace to crown himself. Her implication is that he acted prematurely, and committed what amounted to usurpation. This description of Alexios' last hours does little to increase the reader's confidence in Anna's description of Alexios' relationships with his other near-peers. Surely Alexios' system of governing, which came to rely increasingly upon family members to fill important positions, would have included the emperor's heir. This deliberate omission is particularly significant when we consider the

⁵ *Alexiade*, II, 198-199. Anna's description of Alexios' new battle formation is the most disappointing of her descriptions. Despite her muddled efforts it neither tells us how the men were arranged nor why it was effective against the Turks.

⁶ Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica I*, Akademie Verlag (Berlin, 1983), 219. Alexander Kazhdan essentially agrees. See his *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1985), 214.

⁷ *Alexiade*, II, 173. Anna tries to justify her excessive praise of her father. It is usually impossible to determine which events she actually saw, but given Anna's position and gender, she would not have been an eyewitness to battles.

time and effort Anna spends demonstrating the importance of other members of the imperial family. Prominent examples of this include her grandmother Anna Dalassene, her mother Irene, and her own husband Nikephoros. Anna offers little information on the relationship between Alexios and John. The rather meager descriptions of Niketas Choniates and John Kinnamos offer our only other window on a critical imperial succession.⁸ Anna's affection for Alexios is sincere, but we must weigh her praise of her father against her silence with respect to her brother.

Anna's glorification of Alexios affects her depiction of military events. Eulogy takes precedence over the accurate depiction of battles.⁹ This reflects a more general Byzantine literary attitude towards the army. An emperor who was victorious while avoiding combat, deserved more praise than one who was victorious in pitched battle, which Byzantines regarded as a matter of luck modified by planning.¹⁰ In this context, it makes sense that Anna was not interested in the equipment, training, and recruitment of Alexios' men, particularly when generals other than the emperor commanded them. Anna Komnene's account provides a wealth of geographical and chronological information, information that Michael Psellos, for example, usually omits. She tells us where Alexios went with his army and what troops it contained, if not in any great detail, and this enables us to analyze Alexios' campaign strategies. For example, the movement of armies during the Pecheneg and Cuman campaigns is incredibly complex. Anna's very complete account of these wars (from 1087 to 1091) enables us to follow march and counter-march, and the raising and disbanding of armies. This is also true of Alexios' campaigns against Robert Guiscard and Bohemond, and of the general course of his last campaign against the Seljuk Turks. Despite

⁸ Niketas Choniates, *Niketae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. Van Dieten, CFHB (Berlin, 1975), 5–9, 10–12. (Hereafter abbreviated as 'Choniates, *Historia*'), Choniates presents an altogether different account of John's succession. He indicates that Alexios was very pleased that he had outwitted his wife Irene, and that John had ascended the throne. Furthermore Choniates indicates that Irene was the instigator of the initial coup, in which both Anna and her husband Nikephoros were implicated. Kinnamos offers little further information other than that Alexios had promised John the throne.

⁹ *Alexiade*, I, 164–166. Alexios' flight from Dyrrachion is one of Anna's most fanciful descriptions, and is a good example of how Anna uses her imagination to fill gaps in the narrative.

¹⁰ *Alexiade*, II, 195, 100–101.

her prejudices and omissions, Anna Komnene provides detailed descriptions of many of Alexios' campaigns.

John Zonaras was a high imperial official in the court of Alexios I, and as such, his history offers a counter-point to Anna's biases.¹¹ Zonaras' *Historical Epitome* is a chronicle of world history from the Creation until the end of Alexios' reign, at which time Zonaras probably lost his position as *megas droungarios tes viglas*.¹² A member of Constantinople's civil elite, Zonaras is critical of Alexios' policy with relation to the Senate—the leading aristocrats of the capital. For example, he states that Alexios treated the empire like his own house (*oikos*), granting fiscal exemptions and state properties to his friends and relatives.¹³ He occasionally comments upon military events. For example, when discussing Nikephoros Phokas, he informs us that the emperor's tax policy forced farmers to be taxed as soldiers, and soldiers to be taxed at the next higher grade of military taxation. This only refers to Nikephoros' reign, and no similar information is provided when he discusses Alexios, whether with respect to tactics and strategy, or with respect to the state's military finances.

The *Hyle Historias* of Nikephoros Bryennios, who served both Alexios and John Komnenos as a military officer, is the third source for the tactics and organization of the Komnenian army. His analysis is that of an experienced commander who has observed other experienced commanders. His prose is straightforward, and his description of military events is clear and lucid. This is especially evident when he describes Alexios' battles against Bryennios the elder and Basilakios, which occurred while Alexios was Domestic of the West. Nikephoros Bryennios is similar to most Byzantine chroniclers in that he was more interested in the motivation and character of commanders rather than in the maneuvers, men, and matériel they employed. But Nikephoros, more than any author of the Komnenian period, includes descriptions of the troop types and recruiting grounds of the Byzantine army and of the tactics used by the opposing forces.¹⁴

¹¹ ODB, III, 2229.

¹² ODB, III, 2229. The *droungarios* was originally a military title, roughly equivalent to the rank of regimental commander. By the late eleventh century the *megas droungarios tes vigla* had become a judicial post.

¹³ John Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, ed. M. Pinder and Th. Buttner-Wobst, 3 Vols., CSHB (Bonn, 1841–97), III, 766, I, 11–19.

¹⁴ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Nicephore Bryennios Histoire, Hyle Historias*, CFHB, ed. P. Gautier (Brussels 1975), 269–71, 271–78, for the armies and battle of Alexios and Bryennios, and 113–19.

Nikephoros also provides much of Anna Komnene's source material for the campaigns of Alexios before he became emperor. It is reasonable to suppose that Nikephoros also provided much of the anecdotal detail that fills the later chapters of Anna's history.

Nikephoros' history ends in 1079, two years before Alexios I came to the throne. His account, which examines the army of each rebel in the Byzantine civil wars of 1071 to 1079, gives the most coherent account of the size, composition, and capabilities of the army at the time of Alexios' accession. Bryennios describes the early career of Alexios, tracing his service as a general, and subsequently as Domestic of the West under the emperor Nikephoros Botaneiates. Because of this high post, Alexios was a witness to (indeed, a participant in) many of the battles that Nikephoros Bryennios recounts. But Bryennios' history has value not only for his depiction of Alexios' rather rudimentary tactical ability. It also provides concise descriptions of the armies of Nikephoros Basilakios, Nikephoros Melissenos, Nikephoros Botaneiates, and finally of Alexios himself during his tenure as Domestic of the West. These accounts describe an army still recruited from native *Rhomaioi*—"Romans," as the Byzantines called themselves until the fall of the Empire, and complement Anna's account of Alexios' army and recruitment capabilities in 1081. Eleventh-century Byzantium was a multi-ethnic empire, but to the extent that all troops recruited from within the empire's territories were nominally Byzantine, then all of the above-mentioned armies were Byzantines fighting other Byzantines.¹⁵ Mercenaries were used, but we have little information from Bryennios about the capabilities of Byzantine forces against foreign foes.

Nikephoros' history straddles only nine years, and includes the last two years of Romanos IV's ill-starred reign, the disastrous reign of Psellos' protégé Michael VII, and finally the rebellion and victory of Nikephoros Botaneiates and his first year as emperor. Despite its limited chronological scope, Bryennios' history is essential to an under-

¹⁵ What constituted "Byzantine" identity has been the subject of much debate. Alexander Kazhdan postulated the existence of a *homo byzantinus*, whose traits were: assimilation into Byzantine language and culture, and acceptance within the Byzantine social hierarchy as a native. This historical construction is partially the result of sources prejudiced against anyone who lacked Greek language and culture. It appears sensible to regard as "Byzantine" those who paid the emperor taxes, or who provided service to him as a result of grants from imperial lands or the imperial treasury.

standing of the tensions within the empire in 1081. Attaleiates and Psellos provide graphic examples of how imperial decline had affected the army's upkeep, culminating in the disastrous battle of Manzikert (1071). Bryennios enables us to analyze the army from 1071 to 1081, the decade during which the empire lost Asia Minor. To be sure, Bryennios' prose is less polished than that of other, better-educated Byzantine authors, but his thesis that imperial politics and the events of the civil war were driven by the ambitions of powerful family coalitions is a sophisticated and realistic appraisal of events.¹⁶

Constantine Psellos, known today by his monastic name of Michael, was a complicated personality; his motivations in writing his history clearly included self-justification and self-promotion.¹⁷ The value of his *Chronographia* for the purposes of this study lies in its account of military events during the reigns of Romanos IV Diogenes and Michael VII; it is, moreover, the most important account of the empire from the death of Basil II (1025) until the rise of the Komnenoi. Psellos sketches the chronology of events that destroyed the empire's eastern territories: The years 1058 to 1068 had witnessed an epidemic of Turkoman raids.¹⁸ Following the battle of Manzikert, during the war between Romanos and Michael, the empire's eastern frontier was stripped of its last defenders, as each rebellious general or magnate tried to obtain troops for his march on the capital. Michael VII's policy of denying funds to several strategically critical Anatolian military units exacerbated this situation and provoked rebellions from 1071 until 1081, rebellions that ended only when Alexios Komnenos became emperor. Psellos watched imperial power collapse and wrote about it from the perspective of an insider.

¹⁶ Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 106; "The work of Nikephoros Bryennios is probably the most aristocratically biased Byzantine history of this period; it presented the noble warrior in a fully generalized and idealized form. The caesar Bryennios . . . was, in all, the ideologue of the Komnenian military aristocracy."

¹⁷ Michel Psellos, *Chronographie*, ed. and tr. É. Renauld (Paris, 1967), II, 128-29 (Bk. 6, 22-28). Psellos justifies his criticisms of the emperor, Constantine IX—in spite of the evident favoritism that Constantine had shown him—by asserting his high purpose: impartiality.

¹⁸ George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969); 343. The most notable of these raids were the sacking of Ani and Caesarea in the years 1065 and 1067 respectively. Of all of Byzantium's enemies, the Turkomans, Turkish raiders who were outside of Seljuk control, were the greatest threat to Byzantine sovereignty throughout the Komnenian period. The Seljuk rulers made treaties with emperors, but the Turkoman tribes ignored the agreements and were a particular threat in the empire's borderlands.

He recognized that the bureaucratic government stripped the frontiers of manpower in times of crisis, while ignoring his own attendant responsibility (as a distinguished member of this bureaucracy) for crippling the provincial military class at a time when a strong military was crucial to imperial survival. This lack of personal responsibility for misguided policies in which he was a key adviser is particularly evident during the reigns of Constantine X and Michael VII. Psellos claims to have profoundly influenced both emperors, whose reigns—militarily—were failures.¹⁹ During the reign of Michael VII, Turkish raiders poured across the frontier, while the rebellions of Nikephoros Melissenos and Nikephoros Botaneiates were a consequence of the emperor's incompetence. These rebellions, combined with the denuding of the frontiers to defend the capital, destroyed any pretense of imperial control in Asia Minor.²⁰ Psellos, however, refuses to acknowledge his role in these difficulties, despite his claim to have been the primary influence upon these emperors.

Michael Psellos misunderstood the struggle for power between the central government and local centers of authority, interpreting all social struggles as evidence of the importance of the emperor, rather than as evidence of other social difficulties. Central authority assumed two forms. One was the control of taxation and the disbursement of the collected monies and produce. The other was control of the central bureaucratic apparatus, including control of the throne. A bureaucracy concentrated in the capital ruled Byzantium during the eleventh century, which kept resources out of the hands of provincial men of power (*dynatoi*). Constantinople's control of the empire's production surplus prompted the provincial leadership to seek to control the bureaucratic apparatus. Between 1071 and 1081 six Anatolian provincial leaders rebelled, each of whom attempted to make himself emperor. Psellos' analysis demonstrates a surprisingly rudimentary understanding of this struggle: to Michael, the emperor seemed so clearly the focus of power that it was impossible to conceive of permanent alternative centers. This point of view was natural for Byzantine chroniclers, most of whom resided in Constantinople, the seat of the emperor's power and the one region the emperor

¹⁹ Psellos, II, 149, 176–77. Psellos claims to have personally prevented Constantine from going to war, and asserts that Michael VII trusted him more than his own brothers.

²⁰ Psellos, II, 182–85. *Alexiade*, I, 11–38.

could almost always absolutely control. Constantinople, “the City” to *Rhomaioi* everywhere, received constant reminders of imperial glory in the form of festivals, donations of monasteries, and military parades, not to mention more mundane but immediately practical works such as charitable foundations, aqueducts, cisterns, and defensive fortifications. When a usurper seized the throne, the chronicler inevitably saw this as a manifestation of the importance of the imperial position rather than evidence of forces opposed to it.

Despite his urbane sophistication, Michael Psellos is in this respect no different from other Byzantine chroniclers. While recognizing that the army and the provincial elites were crucial to the empire's survival, he focuses on the character and personality of each emperor to the exclusion of their deeds. To be fair to Michael, there is more to this than mere scandal mongering.²¹ Michael VII chose counselors such as Michael Psellos and the eunuch Nikephoritzes, and apparently enjoyed the delights of philosophy more than any satisfaction he might have obtained from solving (or trying to solve) the empire's pressing problems. During his reign, Byzantine influence in the Balkans collapsed as a result of internal rebellions and the attacks of the Hungarians and Pechenegs. In the east, Turkish raids grew in force and frequency. All the same, only an emperor could request military aid from a western ruler. Michael appealed to Pope Gregory VII for aid against the Turks, an appeal that laid the groundwork for the Crusades. The personality of the emperor was critical to the strength of the state, but whether Psellos understood how important the provinces were to the emperor and the empire is open to question.

Alexander Kazhdan considers Psellos' *Chronographia* to represent a break with an idealizing tradition in Byzantine chronicle: Psellos' characters, in contrast to those of earlier chroniclers, are believable and fully formed human beings.²² It may be that his interest in human character and its effect upon political activity came at the

²¹ Psellos, II, 128–29.

²² Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 211–13. This contention is debatable. Certainly Psellos was a perceptive analyst of Byzantine court culture and a fair and even-handed observer if measured against earlier chroniclers such as Theophanes. But other sophisticated contemporaries of Michael Psellos, notably Michael Attaleiates and Anna Komnene, were equally (if not more) capable of careful character studies. It may be that Attaleiates and Anna were less interested in character as the basis of identity than was Michael Psellos.

expense of a more modern notion of the effects of economic and social forces. For example, Romanos IV's army in 1071 was dangerously unprepared for a major campaign.²³ According to Michael Attaleiates, the levies drawn from Asia Minor had rusty weapons, little equipment, and almost no training.²⁴ Psellos however, attributes the disaster at Manzikert to faults in Romanos' personality, despite all of the evidence that he musters in support of a contrary (and more plausible) argument.²⁵ The example of Michael IV, who despite a wasting disease successfully campaigned against the Bulgarians, is a notable exception.²⁶ It is tempting to see Michael's fascination with the character of Byzantine rulers as rhetorical excess. In an imperial monarchy there was an understandable tendency to look for a connection between the emperor's health (and particularly his mental health) and the vitality of the state. Health was considered a reflection of the divine will, or at least a mirror of the ruler's character. Michael's aristocratic prejudices and personal ties to several emperors led him to assume that the fate of the empire lay exclusively under the control of the emperor himself. Whether we agree with him or not, Michael Psellos identified personal virtue—"greatness"—with the office of emperor. Revolts were an indication of the importance of the imperial position—part of an automatic process in which great men were drawn to the throne.

Psellos' attitude towards the military reflects the prejudices and priorities of the professional bureaucrat. His summary descriptions of battles bespeak a lack of personal military experience, and they also reflect Psellos' belief that leading an army into battle was a science, governed by rules and traditions as rigid as those of rhetoric or medicine. War, like other disciplines, was a fit subject for theoretical speculation. As with all things in Michael's cosmos, one would

²³ Psellos, II, 159–62.

²⁴ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1953), 103. Attaleiates provides the best description of the poor training and condition of the Byzantine soldiers. The men lacked weapons, had little training, and had been so long neglected that they were soldiers in name only.

²⁵ Psellos, II, 158–59. Michael, the epitome of the courtier, objects strenuously to Romanos' inability to take advice. This was the character flaw that, according to Michael, caused Romanos to lead his army to disaster.

²⁶ Psellos, I, 78–79. Michael's endurance on campaign while wracked with disease calls to mind Alexios' last illness. The accounts of these campaigns, led by invalid emperors, is one indication of how important military valor was to the Byzantines from the eleventh century onwards.

meet with success if a venture were begun with well-ordered plans.²⁷ Psellos contrasts the haphazard way in which Romanos IV prepared for war with the "proper" method of waging war, ascribing the decision to divide the Byzantine forces before the battle of Manzikert to the emperor's ignorance of military science.²⁸ Romanos, however, was campaigning in the barren highlands of southern Armenia, where a large army needed to disperse in order to find supplies; Psellos seems to have ignored or put no credence in the exigencies of campaigning. Doubtless in the atmosphere of the Doukas court during the 1170s, any criticism of Romanos was welcome, but Romanos' decision was a sound one, since he had to provision his army. Byzantine scouts failed to discern that the emperor faced the full Seljuk army, rather than the local contingents that the emperor expected. Romanos might have won the battle even under these circumstances, but the treachery of Andronikos Doukas, who withdrew his units at the critical moment, ensured defeat. Michael confuses military expertise with the administration of a branch of the imperial bureaucracy: a general's responsibility was essentially administrative—organization and planning. In practice, however, personal participation and luck often played as great a role as dispassionate calculation.²⁹

While complaining that Romanos lacked knowledge of military science, Psellos himself demonstrates only the most rudimentary familiarity with the art of tactics. Bardas Skleros, a Byzantine general, fought as a mercenary for the Arabs in 979. In recounting the events of a battle fought by Skleros' cavalry, Psellos says that the Byzantine cavalry charged its opponent from the two flanks; no information about equipment or their opponent's tactics is provided.³⁰ When Michael VI fought the usurper Isaac Komnenos in 1057, Psellos was one of Michael's courtiers and should as a consequence have been familiar with the events of the battle, but his account of the battle-line refers only to flanks and a center without any details. Psellos' description of this battle resembles Michael Attaleiates' description

²⁷ Psellos, II, 161–62. Psellos subsequently berates Romanos for his autocratic leadership.

²⁸ Psellos, II, 158, 161–62. (Bk. 7, 20). Michael believed that general should be positioned behind his army, where he could conduct the battle with a cool head. Circumstances, often dictated otherwise, but Michael appears unaware of this. See Psellos, II, 158.

²⁹ Psellos, II, 161–63.

³⁰ Psellos, I, 7–9. Psellos does not specify the enemy Skleros fought.

of the events at Manzikert. The actions of a single man, in this case Isaac Komnenos, ensured victory for the rebels. Psellos claims that the imperial troops could not dislodge Isaac because they physically pressed him from both sides, but this is merely a rhetorical image. Anna Komnene found it sufficiently convincing that she used the account for her description of Alexios' heroics during the first battle of Dyrrachion.³¹ Given his assumption that historical events were driven by the actions of powerful individuals, it is characteristic of Psellos to attribute victory to the heroic character of Isaac, fighting as an individual, rather than to his ability as a commander.

Psellos offers only the most rudimentary tactical analysis and provides little other military information that would help the historian understand the army. When he does offer detail, as he does in his account of the battle of Manzikert, we are fortunate in having Attaleiates' account as corroboration.³² Psellos provides valuable information for understanding the rivalries that led to the decline of Byzantine military power. He is a less useful source for showing how problems within the army contributed to the decline of the middle Byzantine state.

The seven books of John Kinnamos' *History* encompass the period from 1118 to 1176, spanning the reign of John II Komnenos and that of Manuel I until his defeat at the battle of Myriokephalon (1176). We know little about Kinnamos' life and career, although Charles Brand has argued that several of Kinnamos' remarks indicate he was a soldier.³³ Kinnamos claims to have been an eyewitness at the battle of Zeugminon in 1165, and his geographical information is often precise and detailed, especially so in his descrip-

³¹ Psellos, II, 90-91; *Alexiade*, I, 163-64 (4, 7). These accounts are sufficiently similar that we can assume that Anna had read Psellos, and that she consciously mimics Psellos' account.

³² Attaleiates, 159-63. Andronikos Doukas was commander of the Byzantine reserve. When he learned that Romanos was under attack by the Seljuks and was cut off from the main body of the army, he took his troops and fled the field. Most of the army followed him in flight. Romanos' reign had meant a decline in the Doukas clan's fortunes. Michael VII Doukas became emperor after Romanos was captured by the Turks. Allowing Romanos the benefit of doubt, his choice of Andronikos as a commander is indicative of the powerful necessity for compromise in Byzantine family and factional disputes, even with the dangerous Doukas faction.

³³ John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenus*, John Kinnamos, tr. C. Brand, (New York, 1976), 3,6.

tion of the Hungarian frontier.³⁴ Although the precision of his account suggests a background in the military, Kinnamos could just as plausibly have been a civil official accompanying the emperor. Indeed, elements of the history suggest that this may be the more likely identification. Kinnamos, for example, remarks at one point that he frequently discussed Aristotle with Manuel,³⁵ a bantering that might have been more likely a topic of discussion between the emperor and an imperial secretary than with military personnel. We know with certainty, however, only that John served as a mid-level bureaucrat, a career that extended from the middle of Manuel's reign until some indeterminate time after the battle of Myriokephalon.³⁶ He had close contact with Manuel, but he never indicates that this led to an important position. Like Niketas Choniates, Kinnamos had no direct contact with Manuel's father, John II, and his information about John's reign is second-hand.

Kinnamos' prose is simple, often consisting of declarative sentences without rhetorical flourish. This is particularly true of his account of the reign of John II. In many instances, the account resembles a monastic chronicle—a list of dates and events, only occasionally interrupted by excursions into the underlying reasons behind events. The orations Kinnamos creates for his emperors and their grandees are routine, varying little in content or construction.³⁷ The chronology of John's history is also imprecise. He describes events associated with a particular person out of sequence, when the individual happens to first appear in the narrative (a common trait of Byzantine chroniclers, who loved to show off their knowledge of court intrigue).³⁸ This skewed chronology, although disconcerting to readers unfamiliar with the events, does not usually disrupt Kinnamos' narrative.

³⁴ Brand, 3.

³⁵ John Kinnamos, *Ioannis Kinnami, Epitomi*, ed A. Meineke (Bonn, 1836), 170-71, 290-91. Naturally John would want to imply a close relationship between himself and the emperor. Kinnamos might have been a soldier at some point in his career, but there is no formal evidence to support that contention.

³⁶ Kinnamos, 206-7. Kinnamos claims he will discuss Myriokephalon later in his account, but his history abruptly in book seven, before the battle.

³⁷ Kinnamos, 26-29, 173-74. The first is John's death speech, used by Kinnamos to justify Manuel's claim to the throne over the claim of his brother Isaac. The second speech is a similarly uninspiring and unrealistic attempt to portray Manuel's embassy to the Doge of Venice in 1166.

³⁸ Kinnamos, 121-24. Andronikos' career is a fascinating example of the extent to which Komnenian emperors avoided family strife by not extending the

John's accuracy suffers, however, in his account of Manuel's deeds and decisions. Whenever Manuel appears, Kinnamos falls prey to a prolific obsequiousness. At one point, John states that he personally saw Manuel drive off entire units of foes.³⁹ This hyperbole is particularly tiresome since John's bare-bones account of military events frequently needs supporting information. Nevertheless, exaggerated deeds of imperial prowess were what his audience expected, and John is proficient at providing such descriptions.

Kinnamos shared the typical Byzantine aversion toward the Latins.⁴⁰ He calls the Venetians corrupt and vulgar and maintains that the Second Crusade was an excuse on the part of the French and the Germans to seize the empire. With the exception of marriage, Latins and Byzantines seem to have had no more common ground than did Byzantines and Turks. Marriage was used as a means of securing alliances, but these alliances seldom provided opportunities for increased cultural understanding between east and west. Kinnamos' belief that the Second Crusade, although it reached Asia Minor, posed a grave threat to Byzantium is consistent with Anna Komnene's suspicions. Unlike Anna, moreover, Kinnamos does not credit Latins with superior military prowess. John believed that Byzantine cultural superiority was equally manifested in tactical and strategic supremacy, and in military valor.

Kinnamos, like Psellos before him, believed that history was created by the decisions of great men. For both chroniclers, armies automatically obtain the character of their leaders. Manuel's armies always perform well, while the armies of the hapless Stephen IV of Hungary, reflecting his weak and unstable character, melt away.⁴¹ John invokes fortune as an explanation for why evil happens to good

traditional punishments for treason, execution or mutilation, to those tied to them by blood. Andronikos exhibits constant dereliction of duty; his intrigue with the Hungarians was well known. His affairs were scandalous, as were his comments about Manuel's liaison with his first cousin.

³⁹ Kinnamos, 191–94.

⁴⁰ Kinnamos, 280, 67–68. This passage, in which Kinnamos mentions being surrounded by the enemy, is the only evidence that he may have been a soldier. Kinnamos also says that when he was in the palace he had many times heard of the emperor's prowess. Certainly the implication here is that he usually did not accompany the emperor on campaign.

⁴¹ Kinnamos, 217. Manuel warned Stephen IV not to return to Hungary, since he clearly lacked popular support there. Stephen was finally betrayed and murdered by his counselors.

men. John Doukas, for example, met defeat in Italy after a long string of victories, but even here Kinnamos argues that it was Doukas' pride and inexperience that caused him to fight under unfavorable conditions.⁴² Fortune also appears as a vague threat in Kinnamos' staged speeches.⁴³ This appears to imply a strong element of fatalism, but fatalism and fortune are used by Kinnamos as rhetorical tools rather than to account for how the universe operates, and the terms rarely appear outside of formal (not to say stilted) speeches. There is likewise little theological determinism in Kinnamos' notion of history; rather it is the individual who determines events—and the emperor outshines all other individuals.

The Byzantine army in Kinnamos' works serves as a pretext to highlight Manuel's glory. Like Anna Komnene, Kinnamos only rarely treats the mechanics of military events, but instead highlights the emperor's personal role. Occasional detailed information on the numbers and equipment of various soldiers serves primarily to indicate disparities in the armies' fighting force, but given the sheer number of campaigns Kinnamos describes, these accounts provide a good source for estimating the composition and size of Manuel's army. John also offers considerable detail about Byzantine campaigns and maneuvers during the Hungarian wars. He recounts, in some detail, the rise and fall of Stephen IV, the Hungarians' repeated abrogation of treaties, and of both sides' weapons and tactics. John's descriptions demonstrate a deeper knowledge of events in the west than of Manuel's eastern campaigns.

Kinnamos' foremost goal is to glorify Manuel, but his encomia of the emperor sometimes furnish valuable bits of military realia: a description of Manuel's helmet with its mail face guard; the lance, sword, and mace armament of Byzantine heavy cavalry; and Manuel's "innovation" of a long, Norman-style shield, with the lance used as a primary weapon, in place of the "old" Byzantine style of fighting

⁴² Kinnamos, 151, 165, 168–69. Much of Kinnamos' account of Italy is second-hand and speculative. He states that the emperor Manuel was "probably angry" when he heard of the defeat of Doukas at Brindisi.

⁴³ Kinnamos, 230. Byzantine authors had difficulty determining the place of fate in their literary cosmos. Fate, borrowed by Byzantine authors from classical Greek historians, was a pagan concept, difficult to incorporate into the Christian cosmology. Fate was either the operation of the divine will under a different name, or it was a weaker force—the capricious extension of an individual's ability to make mistakes and undermine his own plans.

with bow and round shield.⁴⁴ Although Kinnamos' claim of innovations in equipment and tactics must be treated with caution, his account accords with Choniates' descriptions in one particular. In both accounts the emperor appears brave to the point of recklessness.⁴⁵ Kinnamos' focus on Manuel, moreover, has the effect of concentrating the discussion on Manuel's military operations; the pretext may well be flattery, but the substance throws light on interesting details of military tactics and techniques, and it allows John to highlight his personal knowledge of the Byzantine frontier with Hungary.

Niketas Choniates wrote after Kinnamos, and he began his career in the Byzantine civil service at the very end of Manuel's reign. Kinnamos wrote while serving as Manuel I's secretary. Choniates' knowledge of Manuel was undoubtedly colored by what people were saying when he was a young adult, and he lacked the intimate contact with Manuel that Kinnamos enjoyed. Nevertheless, we should not discount the opinions of a perceptive commentator who rose to the peak of the Byzantine administrative apparatus and who certainly had access to any official sources, as well as to people who knew Manuel I and John II. Choniates' anti-Komnenian viewpoint provides a useful counter to Kinnamos' unmitigated praise. It is also easier to sympathize with Niketas Choniates than with most Byzantine chroniclers. Unlike the dry and matter-of-fact accounts of Kinnamos and Bryennios, the self-centered worries of Psellos, and the aloof and family-oriented narrative of Anna Komnene, Choniates presents a vibrant picture of life in Byzantium, with street vendors, children's games, and great men's follies,⁴⁶ as well as his own tragic fate. Paul Magdalino succinctly summarizes Niketas' goal: to explain

⁴⁴ Kinnamos, 112, 125, 156–57, 273–74. Manuel retained the Pechenegs and other Turkish mercenaries to provide a Byzantine mounted archer contingent.

⁴⁵ Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 113. Kazhdan notes that personal bravery—the “warrior emperor”—is emphasized as an imperial virtue by a number of Byzantine authors, in particular Michael Attaleiates, Eustathios of Thessalonike, and John Kinnamos.

⁴⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 57–58, 81, 120. Choniates frequently inserts incidents that show popular sentiment for or against the emperor and his minions. He lampoons John Poutze for his niggardliness. Although a wealthy imperial confidante, John was so niggardly that he stopped to pick up a horseshoe he saw lying at the side of the road. Choniates says that some children had heated it red-hot as a prank, knowing that he would not pass up the opportunity to obtain anything free of charge. Kosmas the Deacon was persecuted by Manuel and cursed the empress's womb, saying that she would not bear a son. The street vendors banged iron tools upon their workbenches to make fun of Kilij Arslan, the Seljuk sultan.

the failure of Byzantium by showing why God withdrew his favor from the Rhomaioi.⁴⁷ Choniates' love of Constantinople and its inhabitants make the calamitous events that he describes all the more poignant.

Choniates' chronicle of the Komnenian golden age and of the empire's subsequent collapse encompasses the eighty-six years from the beginning of John II's reign (1118) until the disaster of 1204, when the Fourth Crusade ransacked Constantinople and destroyed the empire. He organized his history in books, each of which corresponds to the reign of an emperor, and wrote the earlier sections after 1183. The final books, which examine the period from 1183 to 1204, were written later, after the Latins had taken the city. According to Gyula Moravcsik, Niketas also used other sources, among them, Eustathios of Thessalonike for the Norman wars, church documents and synodal decisions, and Kinnamos' chronicle.⁴⁸ Niketas' account of John II's years is as fragmentary as Kinnamos'. Both were born after John had died. Choniates' account of Manuel's reign is more detailed and complete than his description of John II's, although he did not begin his own imperial service until soon before Manuel's death in 1180.⁴⁹ It is possible to take exception to Choniates' criticism of Manuel. Choniates' lack of personal experience with the emperor might seem to downplay the chronicler's account. However, unlike Kinnamos, who exemplifies the sycophancy associated with the Byzantine system of imperial patronage, Choniates is a realist, and his portrait of Manuel is believably human.⁵⁰ Choniates places blame for the collapse of Byzantium in the late twelfth century on the Komnenian emperors. By implication this places responsibility for Byzantium's weaknesses squarely on Manuel.⁵¹ It is not the purpose of this study to examine the political and diplomatic effects of Manuel's policies, but an examination of the emperor's military policy inevitably draws conclusions that reflect upon his ability to

⁴⁷ Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos* (Cambridge, 1993), 14.

⁴⁸ Moravcsik, 445–46.

⁴⁹ H. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, 1984), xii. Magoulias cites Michael Choniates' letter to Pontus early in Manuel's reign as evidence that this marked his entry into imperial service.

⁵⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 53–54, 60, 95–96. Choniates describes Manuel's affairs, his arguments with Andronikos and his reluctance to kill his cousin, and Manuel's interest in astrology.

⁵¹ Magoulias, xxiv. Magoulias summarizes the calamities that befell Choniates after the collapse of the empire in 1204.

govern. In this regard it is difficult not to agree with Choniates that Manuel's implementation of policy was deeply flawed. Whatever one's opinion of Manuel, Niketas Choniates provides a useful counterpoint to Kinnamos, as Zonaras does for Anna Komnene, and he also provides us with an account of Manuel's defeat at Myriokephalon, which Kinnamos' account sadly lacks.

Unlike John Kinnamos, Niketas Choniates reached the Byzantine bureaucrat's pinnacle of success, serving as logothete of the sekreta (a high judicial official) under Isaac II Angelos.⁵² Choniates' chronicle attests to his advanced education, as well as to his attitudes and prejudices. In contrast, Kinnamos remained securely and constantly among the ranks of the middling bureaucrats. Both maintained the same Byzantine prejudices against westerners and anyone less well educated, but Kinnamos lacks Choniates' polish and rhetorical flourish. This rhetorical style is not necessarily a virtue, and Choniates' rhetorical descriptions can muddle the facts or events that he is recounting.⁵³ Choniates was contemptuous both of the masses and of court dandies. Particularly obnoxious to him were the attempts of the courtiers to seduce the widowed and lonely empress Maria of Antioch following Manuel's death in 1180.⁵⁴

Of all the chronicles of the middle Byzantine period, Choniates' elitism finds its closest parallel in Michael Psellos' *Chronographia*. Both define "nobility" as the measure of a person's value, but each possesses a different notion of what constitutes nobility. Psellos believed that nobility of the mind was the highest form of nobility, a concept that finds its logical extension in the figure of the philosopher-emperor. In emphasizing intellectual prowess (at the expense of wisdom and sound governance), and with due allowance for the chronicler's politically motivated obsequiousness, Psellos finds much to praise in the juvenile character and disastrous reign of Michael VII. Choniates' notion of nobility includes education, but other qual-

⁵² Magoulias, xiv.

⁵³ Choniates, *Historia*, 146. For example, Choniates comments as follows, after describing how Manuel arrested and tonsured the *protostrator* Alexios Axouch: "Whether Justice was wroth with the emperor over this unjust action, I shall not recount at this time. It behooved Manuel, who was worldly wise and not at all an ignorant and unlettered man, not to waste his labor seeking out him whose name began with alpha as the one to succeed him and bring an end to his rule, but to leave the charge of the reins of government to him who says he is the *alpha* and *omega*, as John instructs me in the Apocalypse." Translation by Magoulias, 83.

⁵⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 223-225.

ities are equally significant. Above all, individual merit is a function of noble birth. According to Alexander Kazhdan, this reflects a shift in values among the Byzantine elite, and is not solely characteristic of Choniates' literary work.⁵⁵ Choniates also sees nobility in the military arts, an identification repeatedly demonstrated in his descriptions of Manuel's courage in battle. In order to demonstrate how this represented a shift in the Byzantine *zeitgeist*, consider the following: Anna Komnene believed that Alexios' personal prowess demonstrated God's grace toward her father, and expressed her observations in the language of Homeric hyperbole. Kinnamos valued military events as evidence of the general superiority of the *Rhomaioi*, and of Manuel in particular. Choniates' more expansive conception of nobility included military prowess, physical perfection, education, and birth.⁵⁶ While this is a more balanced view of personal worth than that followed by other Byzantine chroniclers, it still exhibits a bias toward ability over moral character. Andronikos Komnenos, Manuel's cousin, seduced the wife of the king of Jerusalem (provoking an inter-state incident), rebelled against the emperor, (enlisting a substantial band of barbarian Cumans by force of his personality), and failed in the military undertakings with which Manuel entrusted him. Yet, Choniates inevitably praises him for his cleverness, physical demeanor, and wit. Andronikos' nobility inheres in his personality and physical demeanor: Choniates' dislike of Andronikos's moral corruption and self-serving narcissism is overshadowed by his grudging respect for Andronikos' charisma, and his abilities as a courtier and intriguer.

Choniates believed that history should bring to life the virtuous dead and parade their deeds as an example to the living.⁵⁷ He reiterates Plutarch's view that history exists for the betterment of the reader, by introducing him to men worthy of praise while damning the deeds of evil men.⁵⁸ Niketas, like most Byzantine chroniclers, disclaims any attempt at rhetorical flourish: he is recording (or so he claims) the simple truth. For all that, his language is poetic and

⁵⁵ Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 112-13, 224-30. The chronicles, in praising individual bravery and noble birth, attest to this change in values.

⁵⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 114-15, 103-08. Compare Choniates' description of John Kameronos, the gluttonous, cordax-dancing courtier, with his characterization of Andronikos Komnenos, dashing, capable—and completely amoral.

⁵⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 1.

⁵⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 2.

retorically complex; he even sometimes surpasses Psellos in his ability to create obscure and grammatically difficult passages.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, Choniates provides highly detailed accounts of battle-plans, including personnel and equipment, and he delves at some length into the political and military motives of the commanders. Psellos describes the motives of his main characters, but prefers to focus on broad themes such as fiscal profligacy, moral degeneracy in the imperial family, and the foibles of individual emperors. Choniates is not only interested in the emperors, but also in the activities of their family members and close associates. He describes the collapse of the Byzantine fleet and the subsequent growth of piracy during Manuel's reign.⁶⁰ He also recounts the adventures of Andronikos Komnenos, which covered a territory stretching from Cappadocia to Hungary, and the political intrigue that resulted in the blinding of Styppaiotes, an imperial favorite.⁶¹ Psellos mentions the existence of intrigue; Choniates describes their intimate minutiae. Furthermore, Choniates' visceral dislike of the Latins does not prevent him from examining the growing ties and tensions between Latins and Byzantines within the empire; his account of Manuel's seizure of Venetian property in 1171 is the most often cited example in the secondary literature.⁶² Nevertheless, despite the loss of everything he owned to the Latin conquerors of Constantinople in 1204, Choniates genuinely admired certain Latin lords. This admiration was not compartmentalized—that is, reserved for discrete elements of their character (such as military prowess). Anna Komnene was similarly capable of this limited, "segmented" admiration. In Choniates' history, foreigners appear as individuals, not as caricatures.⁶³ The author's nuanced treatment of his subject may be one reason that Choniates' history appeals to the modern reader.

⁵⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 143. This is one of Choniates' most characteristic descriptions, an utterly confusing account of nothing, albeit beautifully phrased. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica I*, 467 calls Choniates' prose "pompous and bombastic."

⁶⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 54–55. Choniates reports that John of Poutze, Manuel's unapproachable financial minister, took the money collected from the islands for the provisioning of a fleet, and diverted it to the treasury. The result was an increase in piracy.

⁶¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 103–8, 129–32, 138–42 for Andronikos' adventures, and 111–13 for the fall of Styppaiotes.

⁶² Choniates, *Historia*, 171–74.

⁶³ Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 184.

Niketas Choniates seems to have had a more sophisticated understanding of military operations and upkeep than did Anna Komnene or John Kinnamos. First, he recognizes the necessity of careful planning in military operations.⁶⁴ Most Byzantine authors write as if battle were matter of luck or fate, treating military planning as drawing-room conversation. Psellos complains of Romanos IV's lack of "military science" as if the practice of the military art were a purely academic discipline like the rules of rhetoric. Kinnamos and Anna glorify the military prowess of individual emperors, while generally ignoring key elements of military strategy such as proper planning and securing of military matériel. Choniates' measured explanation of John's failure at the Battle of Kinte, in Pontos (1139),⁶⁵ and his description of Manuel's defeat and personal breakdown at Myriokephalon demonstrate that he understood the practical side of combat: the necessity of careful planning, the effects of proper leadership, and the value of training, discipline, and equipment.⁶⁶ Choniates' nonpartisan approach to analysis of imperial actions gives the reader greater confidence in the accuracy of his description of military events. Kinnamos briefly mentions Myriokephalon, saying that Manuel's valor forestalled disaster.⁶⁷ By contrast, when Choniates describes the battle, he provides specific information about the emperor's lack of leadership and his psychological instability. He describes Manuel's foolish decision to march through the mountainous defiles of Myriokephalon without properly determining whether the pass had been cleared of Turkish soldiers, an error of judgment that caused the destruction of the strongest army Manuel ever assembled. Indeed, no Byzantine army until the end of the empire in 1453 would ever

⁶⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 110–11. Manuel disbands his troops at Antioch and they are attacked on the road home. For Manuel's attack on Serbia (and an indictment of his lack of planning), see Choniates, *Historia*, 92.

⁶⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 34–35. In this campaign the pack animals and war horses died of malnourishment, and John was forced to give infantry standards to his cavalry to pretend he had more mounted soldiers.

⁶⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 180–81. Manuel failed at Myriokephalon, where the more maneuverable Turks ambushed his troops in narrow defiles. Here, as at Manzikert a hundred years earlier, the Byzantine defeat was due to command failure and a lack of proper scouting. Choniates (p. 187) describes Manuel's loss of nerve at the battle, proposing to flee with his officers and leave the foot soldiers to be slaughtered.

⁶⁷ Kinnamos, 207. This weak and disingenuous passage is Kinnamos's only commentary on the battle; his account breaks off as Manuel is gathering troops for his campaign.

approach the size and strength of the one lost at Myriokephalon. Whether describing the misuse of naval funds or the loss of an initial advantage in the Italian wars, Niketas' account of Manuel's reign contains a balanced array of useful military information.⁶⁸

Choniates lived through a series of events that led to the empire's destruction in 1204, for which he placed general blame on the Komnenoi, and in particular on Manuel. His bitterness is understandable: Choniates suffered many personal hardships as the result of policies enacted by Manuel and Andronikos Komnenos. This brings us to a central difference (succinctly characterized by Alexander Kazhdan) between Choniates and previous Byzantine chroniclers: Psellos wrote with the belief that the empire of the *Rhomaioi* would emerge victorious and renewed. Choniates, with the benefit of hindsight, wrote a history in which he was convinced Byzantium was doomed. According to Kazhdan, Choniates introduced a "tragic realism," to Byzantine historiography.⁶⁹ But does Choniates' tragic realism or fatalism in fact mean that the empire was unable to stand up to its enemies, or that it was weaker in 1180 than in 1100? This study maintains that the Byzantine Empire was stronger in 1180 than it had been in 1118, when Alexios I Komnenos died. The empire was also an economic powerhouse, as strong or stronger than it had been since the ninth century. Why, then, did the empire collapse so suddenly and completely in 1204? Manuel's alliances depended on ties of marriage and personal agreements with individual rulers. The army Manuel had at his disposal was the same army fielded by John II, his father, recruited from the same, vulnerable regions and continued to contain large numbers of mercenaries. The Byzantine army of the 1170s was about as strong as it had been in the early twelfth century; Byzantium's enemies were far more formidable in 1180 than they had been in 1118. Robert Guiscard, the great rival of Alexios I, was nearly the empire's equal in military power. When the German emperor Frederick I Barbarossa marched through the Balkans in 1189 his mere presence upset in a moment all of Byzantium's carefully constructed alliances. Despite this apparent fragility, it is important to remember that the military and social weaknesses, so evident to the modern reader, were relative. The

⁶⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 180.

⁶⁹ Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 229.

empire's political and military situation was far more complex in the late twelfth century than it had been even fifty years before. To a "Roman," the empire still had the resources to dominate the strategic heartland between Islam and the West. However, the Latin West had become better organized and more powerful, as Byzantium would soon find out.

Alexios inherited an army that had been starved of funds by bureaucratic administrations of the mid-eleventh century and further damaged by civil wars during the reigns of Michael VII and Nikephoros Botaneiates. The process of military reconstruction was critical to the empire's ability to survive its external enemies, as was Alexios' reliance upon his relatives to maintain his position amid the disasters of the first half of his reign. Political and military reconstruction were intimately linked. The marginalization of the imperial bureaucracy was mirrored by a "de-professionalization" of the army: during earlier periods, soldiers were recruited and paid relatively regularly by the state, whether in gold or in land, and there was a consistent rank structure. In other words, professional troops were tied to the state by a structure that disbursed pay and determined advancement. This highly organized system is less evident in the Komnenian sources than it is in the sources from earlier periods of Byzantine history.

Alexios' military goal was to create an army capable of fighting Normans, Pechenegs, and Turks, each of which possessed different military tactics and strategic goals. Politically, Alexios attempted to rule independent of the imperial bureaucracy, since he had ample experience with its ability to starve the eleventh-century army. Alexios' army became increasingly irregular and mercenary as his reign progressed. Allied levies, paid foreigners, and Byzantine militia replaced the *themata* (provincial units) and the *tagmata* (guard units). This change was initially beneficial. Byzantium fought defensive wars during Alexios' reign, and the army relied upon irregular warfare and skirmishing for many of its campaigns. Irregular forces were advantageous for this type of warfare. Mercenaries supplemented with levies eventually—with time, training, and experience proved capable of defeating Alexios' enemies in battle. Anna Komnene describes these events and transformations in some detail; combined, the accounts of Psellos, Attaliates, Zonaras, Bryennios, and Anna Komnene, provide historians with a coherent picture of how the Byzantine army changed and developed between 1071 and 1118.

By the time of John II's accession in 1118, the Byzantine Empire had survived forty years of constant warfare. John continued his father's campaigns, extending Byzantine control along the southern Anatolian coastline. Most of his policies were directed at securing Antioch, a goal that remained unrealized. Manuel continued an aggressive policy in the East, eventually marrying an Antiochene princess. Manuel's victories created an illusion of military power, but they masked more important weaknesses. Byzantium's navy was weak, and it no longer had a regular, organized army with a sophisticated recruitment and defensive system. In addition, foreign mercenaries were loyal *only* to whoever paid them, and allied troops were completely unreliable. Manuel's expedient of paying with *pronoia* (land grants), failed to provide his successors with a ready source of loyal men. In the pages that follow we will examine what measures Alexios, John, and Manuel each took to remedy the lack of regular forces, and the effects that their policies had on the military and political power of the empire.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ELEVENTH- AND
TWELFTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM

The empire that Alexios Komnenos wrested from Nikephoros Botaneiates in 1081 bore little resemblance to the state bequeathed by Basil II to his brother Constantine fifty-six years earlier. In the west, the empire's northern frontier along the Danube River was unstable, and the Pechenegs raided Bulgaria and Macedonia with impunity. With the growing power of the Árpád kings, the Serbian frontier was also insecure. The only remaining Byzantine outpost in Italy was lost in 1071. In the 1040s the Byzantine general George Maniakes conquered eastern Sicily and with proper logistical support might have seized the entire island. Mismanagement and neglect of Sicily and southern Italy, however, resulted in the expulsion of the Byzantines from these territories a mere thirty years later.

In the east, a decade of civil war disrupted the reigns of Michael VII and Nikephoros Botaneiates (1071–81). During these reigns, emperors and usurpers alike began to employ substantial numbers of Turkish mercenaries. Nikephoros Melissenos made use of Turkish troops in his unsuccessful bid for the throne; when his rebellion failed, these mercenaries occupied the cities they had been sent to garrison, and ruled them. Imperial authority in Asia Minor was also threatened by the proximity of territory occupied by the Turks to the Aegean Sea. This made land-based communication with beleaguered eastern outposts nearly impossible. The extent of the empire's disorganization can be gauged by Botaneiates' inability to recruit more than a few hundred men in Asia Minor during his own rebellion. The men he was able to gather were probably the personal retainers of his adherents rather than soldiers who left their farms to join his cause. A few posts along the Black Sea, Herakleia, Sinope, and parts of Paphlagonia remained under nominal imperial control. Cilicia, held by Armenian autarchs, maintained a precarious independence. The Gabras family established itself in Trebizond, and the Pontos Mountains protected the empire's territories along the Black Sea littoral.

Asia Minor and the Turkish Conquest

At the beginning of his reign, Alexios' empire consisted of the Aegean and Pontic coastal regions. Inland territory followed the course of the great Balkan river valleys of the Strymon and Vardar. The Danube River was a largely theoretical frontier until the decisive defeat of the Pechenegs in 1092. The natural boundaries that had protected the empire in Asia Minor—the Taurus Mountains, the Cappadocian passes, and the highlands of western Armenia—were controlled by bands of Turks or by rebellious Armenian officers who had defected from the imperial army. The densely populated and fertile river-valleys and coastal plains of western Asia Minor, as well as the Maiander River valley, were under Turkish control, ruled by dynasts such as Tzachas, the overlord of Smyrna.¹ The Turks also controlled the central plateau of Anatolia, where the imperial horse and sheep herds had once grazed. The Seljuk state controlled territory roughly coterminous with the central Asia Minor plateau. The Seljuk capital, Nicaea, stood just off the plateau to the west; Ikonion, the other great Rûm Seljuk city, was situated at the southeastern border of central Anatolia. The Danishmendids, another Turkish tribe, occupied the mountainous and strategic uplands of the former provinces of Anatolikon and Armeniakon. The complicated imperial system of defense, based upon *themes* (military provinces) commanded by *strategoi* (generals), *kleisourai* (passes) commanded by *droungarioi* (lieutenants), and *kastra* (forts) for local defense had disappeared in the dislocations associated with the Turkish invasion. This system had defended imperial territory from the seventh through the late eleventh century; there is no evidence for its continuation in sources from Alexios' reign. Rebellious commanders stripped the frontiers of men, and the meager resources that remained were used for local defense and were thus unavailable to the central government.² For example, the city of Trebizond, situated on the far east-

¹ Anna Comnena, *Alexiade*, ed. Bernard Leib, 3 vols. (Paris, 1937–76), II, 110 (VII.8.1). For a discussion of Turks in general, see *Alexiade* I, 131 (III.9.3); John Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, ed. M. Pinder and Th. Buttner-Wobst, 3 vols., CSHB (Bonn, 1841–97), vol. III, 736.17–737.6 (XVIII.22); and M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204: A Political History* (London, 1984), 110.

² For accounts of how the civil wars of the decade preceding Alexios' reign affected imperial control of Asia Minor, see the rebellions of Nikephoros Botaneiates (recounted in Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1953), 238–43) and

ern frontier of the empire, was briefly overrun by Turkish tribesmen (1071) and was unable to provide money or manpower to the imperial government in Constantinople. Within several years local Byzantine forces under the Gabras family seized the city and re-organized the southern frontier along the Pontic Mountains, but Trebizond still failed to provide resources for the central government.³ The Norman adventurer Roussel of Bailleul successfully defended another Anatolian province, Kastamonou in the old *theme* of Paphlagonia, but Nikephoros Botaneiates, the emperor, considered this independent activity to be a threat to the government in Constantinople, and had Roussel captured and blinded by Turkish mercenaries.

One must ask why Botaneiates worried about a rebellious Norman servant defending a remote block of territory near the Black Sea, when the Turks had overrun most of Asia Minor. Michael Angold finds a cause for this behavior in Roussel's establishment of an independent authority and his proclamation of *caesar* John Doukas as emperor. These concerns may have been prominent in Constantinople since John Doukas had been the imperial general sent against Roussel.⁴ Anna Komnene suggests that Tzachas, the Turkish ruler of Smyrna, Robert Guiscard, and most of the crusader leaders also aspired to the imperial throne. It should therefore come as no surprise, that emperors ignored larger problems because of these minor rebellions; emperors had to be sensitive to organized threats to their imperial position. Angold's argument that the imperial aspirations of certain adventurers prompted a response is a reasonable supposition. A more likely reason for Botaneiates' desire to eliminate Roussel was that Roussel's rebellion was a smaller problem than the Turkish invasion; this was a problem the emperor was capable of handling. This required the help of the emperor's Turkish allies, but successful resolution of any problem of this type was politically useful to a usurper-emperor who was having difficulty holding onto the throne.

Byzantines soon saw the Turks in the same way they had seen the Slavs of the seventh century.⁵ The Slavs had occupied imperial

of Nikephoros Melissenos (on which see *Alexiade*, I, 90 (II.9.1); Zonaras III, 732; For the rebellion of Roussel, see Attaleiates, 183–93, *Alexiade*, I, 10 (I.1–2). Zonaras III, 709–12. Botaneiates and Melissenos placed Turkish mercenaries in the cities that they obtained, while Roussel gathered imperial soldiers of western origin.

³ Angold, 96.

⁴ Angold, 93–95.

⁵ *Alexiade*, II, 210–12, (X.6.) Turks are sometimes called barbarians, or Ishmaelites,

territory and made communication difficult, but the empire eventually successfully absorbed them. The Turks were also occasionally willing to serve the empire for pay. This maintained the illusion that the emperor controlled the territories, populated by Greeks, which they loosely occupied. In hindsight it seems foolish that emperors and rebellious military leaders of the eleventh century placed cities and strategic places in the hands of foreign mercenaries.⁶ We must remember that the Turks entered Asia Minor both as raiders and as mercenaries in the civil wars that followed Romanos IV's defeat at Manzikert. Why would we expect the Byzantine government, with six centuries of success assimilating foreign peoples, be any more dismayed by the prospect of assimilating some loose Turkish bands than they had been by the incursions of Slavs, Bulgarians, Armenians, or Serbs? Why would there be more danger in employing eastern Turks than the western Turks, Pechenegs, who continued to prove both controllable and effective as mercenaries?

Europe

The eastern territories were outside of imperial control. As a consequence, Alexios was forced to rely upon the European portion of his empire for recruits and tax revenues. Until 1014 the interior of the empire's European territories had been controlled by an independent Bulgaria under Tsar Samuel. Bulgaria appears only once in Anna Komnene's list of places that supplied men to the imperial army. Bulgaria during the Komnenian period, bounded on the south by the Haimos Mountains and on the west by the Strymon River, does not appear in any discussion of Byzantine manpower. Alexios and John fought battles there, and the Pechenegs used the region as a base for their raids, but our source accounts of battles do not include mention of Bulgarian troops. Vlachs, who supplied men for

but the Latins consistently are depicted as arrogant, greedy and unreasonable. Byzantine chroniclers describe both races as competent at war. While the Turks can be treacherous allies, the Latins are described as both treacherous and contemptible in other ways. See also: John Kinnamos, *Ioannis Cinnami, Epitomi*, ed. A. Meineke, (Bonn, 1836), 201; (IV.24), 59; (II.9), 66-67; (II.11), 635-6; (XVII.25.) Attaleiates, 105. Niketas Choniates, *Niketae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. Van Dieten, CFHB (Berlin, 1975), 116-22, 175-76.

⁶ Angold, 96-97.

Alexios' army at Mt. Lebounion, came from the Haimos Mountains, the Manicheans lived near Philippopolis and even the Pechenegs, following their suppression, were settled in the Vardar valley, north of Thessalonike.⁷

Hellas is also a military dead zone in our literary sources. Choniates mentions that the islands normally provided the money for naval expenses, but this does not refer to mainland Greece, and these expenditures were naval, not army expenditures.⁸ The most important example of military activity in Greece under the Komnenoi appears in Choniates' and Kinnamos' descriptions of the Norman attacks on Corinth and Thebes while Manuel was preoccupied with the passage of the Second Crusade through imperial territory. We know that Manuel garrisoned Greece and fortified the most important cities, but we have no evidence that this region provided men for any Komnenian field army. Despite Choniates' insistence that the garrison of Corinth was sufficient for its defense, and that the citadel was well fortified, Manuel does not seem to have taken further measures for the protection of Greece after the Norman sack of Corinth and Thebes.⁹ Southern Greece was not an imperial priority.

The four remaining European provinces—Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, and Thessalonike provided the Komnenian army with most of its native manpower. The Komnenian emperors also spent most of their time defending these regions. Alexios' campaigns across the Haimos Mountains should be interpreted as attempts to forestall Pecheneg penetration of this economic and military heartland. After

⁷ For details on the geography of the western half of the empire, see *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, Bd. 6: Thrakien, Peter Soustal (Vienna, 1991); and *T.I.B.*, Bd. 1: Hellas and Thessalia, Herbert Hunger (Vienna, 1976.) For information on cities and urban activity in Asia Minor and the rest of the empire see, A.H.M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford, 1971.)

⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 55. John of Poutze diverted funds provided by the islands (which were used to support the Aegean naval squadrons) to the central treasury. According to Choniates the central government then diverted these monies to other uses, the fleets decayed and this caused an increase in piracy. There is no echo of this in Kinnamos.

⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 74-76, ll. 69-78. Choniates says that while the citadel of Acrocorinth was nearly impregnable, the garrison, led by Nikephoros Chaloupes, was unwarlike and allowed it to be captured because they remained inactive during the Norman attack. Kinnamos also examines this incident. Kinnamos, 92; (III.2.) As with most information that reflects poorly upon Manuel's decisions, Kinnamos does not report, as Niketas Choniates does, that the incompetence of the local commander and his men resulted in the loss of Corinth.

years of raid and counter-raid, Alexios mustered the full Byzantine army only when the Pechenegs invaded Thrace and blocked the communication route between Thessalonike and Constantinople.¹⁰ In 1122, John II fought the Pechenegs, "destroying" them a second time. Alexios' Norman wars were attempts to keep the Normans out of this heartland by restricting them to the western plain of Epiros until political factors forced them to return to Italy. John and Manuel's western policies did not extend imperial territory, but created buffer states around the European troop- and revenue-producing provinces.

The strategic center of the Komnenian Empire became the narrow strip of the Aegean littoral, interrupted by occasional river valleys that extended imperial territory into the interior. This took the place of the tenth- and early-eleventh century recruiting grounds of Asia Minor. However, the *thematic* military structure of the eastern provinces was not replaced by like structures in the west. The *theme* system of recruitment, with its local military units organized under a *droungarios* or *strategos* was never as fully developed in the western provinces as in the east.¹¹ Furthermore, Balkan geography provided the western provinces with little defense against invasion. During some winters the Danube river froze, and in this condition it provided a highway for invaders.¹² Justinian had tried to build fortification networks and patrol fleets to hold back the trans-Danubian tribes, but without success. The emperor Maurice, author of the *strategikon*, lost his throne while campaigning north of the Danube, in an attempt to forestall invasion. The Carpathian Mountains also funneled tribes away from the Hungarian plain and toward the empire's Danube frontier. The growth of a powerful Hungarian kingdom during the eleventh and twelfth centuries only exacerbated this tendency. South

¹⁰ *Alexiade*, II, 139–44 (VIII.5.1–9.) This was the battle of Lebonion, in April 1091.

¹¹ Michael F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300–1450*. (Cambridge, 1985), 191–92. Hendy has produced the best available discussion of the physical economy of the Byzantine Empire; he describes the climate and physical geography, and its effect upon the economy of both the Balkans and Asia Minor. He also examines how these factors affected the distribution of magnates, imperial estates and the re-establishment of Byzantine power in the coastlands of Asia Minor.

¹² *Alexiade*, II, 81–2; (VI.14), III, 183; (XIV.9) The Danube River was easily crossed by invaders. But see also II, 92; (VII.6) for use of the imperial fleet to prevent transit of the Danube. Kinnamos, 7, 113–14, 201–02, for the Pechenegs, the emperor and the Cumans crossing the Danube. Choniates, *Historia*, 93–94. The Cumans are said to have crossed the Istros (Danube) with ease by tying inflated skins to their horses.

of the Danube, the Haimos Mountains provided an unreliable barrier; did not succeed at keeping out Pecheneg and Cuman raiders.

West of Thrace was Macedonia, divided into the provinces of Thessalonike and the Strymon. Macedonia's valleys run north south and provided useful routes for northern invaders. The only secure border was to the west, where large and difficult mountains blocked access and provided defensible passes. In 1083 Bohemond sent Norman armies north and south of these mountains but was unable to cross them against Byzantine resistance. His main army marched south and east, and wintered in the Thessalian plain before moving north into the Thessalonike region. This was the same strategy pursued by Lucius Aemilius Paullus against Perseus of Macedonia in 168 B.C.¹³ In 1106 Alexios I garrisoned several key points—Dyrrachion, Avlona, Canina, Petroula, and the passes of Arbanus—and used the geography of Epiros to restrict the Norman army to the Epirot littoral.¹⁴ The strategic use of geography was essential to the success of the Komnenian emperors' defensive campaigns.

The Loss of Asia Minor

A full discussion of the economy of Asia Minor, and of the complex political and economic changes in this region between 1025 and 1071 would require a substantial independent study. Speros Vryonis, Michael Hendy, and Mark Whittow have thoroughly examined the reasons this region became vulnerable to Turkish attack.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Byzantine loss of Asia Minor, the largest and most important portion of the empire, does require some explanation. This

¹³ Livy, *Histoire Romaine*, vol. 32 (books 43–44), ed. P. Jal (Paris, 1976), 40–42, contains a good description of the military geography of Thessaly and the routes north into Macedonia. *Alexiade*, II, 22–24; (V.5.1–3). The Normans attacked northward, taking Skoplje, and occupying Ochrid. Failing to take the citadel of Ochrid, he turned north and attacked other places in Serbia. He then turned south to Kastoria and besieged Larissa, in Thessaly, for six months.

¹⁴ *Alexiade*, III, 104–5 (XIII.5.1–3.)

¹⁵ John Haldon, "The Army and the Economy: The Allocation and Redistribution of Surplus Wealth in the Byzantine State," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 72, (1992), 148–53. See Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (London, 1996), 181–96, for the size of the army to the end of the tenth century. See Hendy, 108–36, for a discussion of the monetary economy. Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris, 1990), 326–28. Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Les effectifs dans l'armée Byzantine" in *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 38: 4,

will provide a basis for understanding the constraints that circumscribed the military decisions of Alexios and his successors.

One theory is that conflicts between aristocratic factions in the capital, and the provincial landed gentry, left the Byzantine army of the late eleventh century without men and matériel. This line of argument contends that landowners of the provinces increased their power by buying up the holdings of smaller farmers.¹⁶ According to this thesis, the droughts and famines of the late tenth century forced small landowners to sell their holdings. Reduced production, in combination with level or rising taxation, rendered these small economic units vulnerable, because they lacked the power to resist imperial taxation. However, the important question is not when "soldier farmers" lost their patrimonies and became dependent upon large land owners, but whether soldier farmers were the most significant method of financing the army.¹⁷

Did the soldier-farmer of Byzantium ever exist in the form proposed by Ostrogorsky?¹⁸ In *The Byzantine Revival*, Warren Treadgold provides financial information on soldiers' pay and allotments from the eighth and ninth centuries, and assumes that the soldiers were soldier-farmers, albeit paid by the central treasury.¹⁹ Others argue that a variety of methods of financing soldiers existed, but reject the notion that soldier-farmers would be capable of the levels of training and equipment necessary for effective campaigning.²⁰ But the army of Theophilos at Amorion, which was composed largely of Anatolian levies, demonstrates all the inefficiencies that historians believe

Octobre-Décembre (1995), 319-35. Speros Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1971), 103-14.

¹⁶ Whitton, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 113-27; Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 56-62; Vryonis, *Decline*, 26, 76-78.

¹⁷ Ostrogorsky, 272-76. The Byzantine "soldier farmer" was supposed to have been a soldier who supported himself either by his own work as a farmer or with the support and aid of other families in his village. There has been much debate about whether these men were exclusively soldiers, and also about the legal status of the lands they held to support their military duties.

¹⁸ Ostrogorsky, 272-76. Ostrogorsky discusses the struggle between the central government and the 'powerful' landowners to control the lands of peasants and soldiers. It is his contention that the central government eventually lost this struggle.

¹⁹ Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival: 780-842* (Stanford, 1988), 349-51.

²⁰ John Haldon, "Military Service, Military Lands, and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations," *DOP* 47 (1993), 24, 65-66; John Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London-New York, 1993), 129-35, 198.

would make local soldiery ineffective. The *thematic* soldiers were often undisciplined and easily frightened. They eventually deserted the emperor and his elite guardsmen. Their lack of discipline, however, did not mean they were without military value. The *thematic* system that the Byzantines used to recruit and support their army was not constructed to produce the best soldiers possible, but rather to make it possible for the state to produce soldiers as cheaply as possible. We should also be careful judging *thematic* levies by their performance in large battles where lines of cavalry charged each other. The skills and styles of fighting necessary to prevent raids differed from the organized discipline of open battle. The levies were used to the irregular warfare of skirmishing and raiding as practiced on the frontiers. Neither the widespread depopulation of Asia Minor, nor the transfer of large sections of land from smallholdings to grazing land is necessary to explain the decline in the quality and usefulness of Asia Minor *thematic* levies. By 1071 these levies had not been used in thirty years. Their poor state of preparedness during Romanos IV's levy was just as possibly due to the central government's neglect of its lists of available soldiers, as to active attacks upon soldiers' livelihoods. Old soldiers died. If the government did not continue to register new soldiers, it should not surprise us that a generation later any soldiers who responded to Romanos' summons were poorly equipped and trained. Our sources—Michael Psellos, Michael Attaleiates, Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryennios—all describe social dislocation in Asia Minor, but social dislocation alone does not imply that army units completely disappear.²¹ The eleventh-century evidence demonstrates that neglect alone was enough to ruin Basil II's army. The argument that soldiers disappeared because they lost their holdings to large landowners assumes that these smallholdings provided the bulk of the imperial soldiery. This assumption is now being re-examined.²²

The motives of the Seljuk Turks also bear re-examination. Why did the Byzantine frontier defenses stop Arab armies that penetrated to the sea of Marmora, but could not stop the Seljuks, whose attacks were less systematic? The answer to this is in the fact that the Seljuks were not equivalent to the Arabs in military equipment, tactics, and

²¹ Attaleiates, 103, ll. 16-19.

²² Whitton, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 116, 181-93.

purpose. First, the the Seljuk Turks were just as sophisticated militarily as had been the Arab armies that confronted emperors from Herakleios to Nikephoros Phokas. Between the 970s and 1071, when the Seljuks dominated the Persian and Arab imperial heartlands, they conquered dozens of large cities, from Isfahan to Tehran, Tabriz, Samarkand and not least, Baghdad. One need only examine the policies and administration of Nizam Al-Mulk and of sultans such as Alp-Arslan and Malik Shah for evidence that the Seljuks understood how to govern the cities and agricultural regions of Persia and Mesopotamia. No city they encountered in Asia Minor was comparable to the rich Islamic centers they already ruled. The sultans correctly considered Asia Minor to be an unimportant backwater. The Armenian highlands, which dominated communication routes north to Azerbaijan and east to Tehran and Isfahan, were far more important. That Asia Minor was important to the Byzantine Empire did not mean that the Seljuks of Mesopotamia and Iran also valued it. On the other hand, historians have correctly recognized that the Seljuk sultans had little control over the raiders who initially penetrated the imperial frontiers in the 1060s, and equally loose control over the raiders and mercenaries who entered the peninsula after the battle of Manzikert in 1071.²³ The Seljuk sultans of Baghdad did not want to control this region. They wanted the unruly Turkomans to move west and live anywhere but in the rich agricultural lands that provided the tax base for their empire.²⁴

Turkoman settlers posed problems for the Byzantine government because they did not form a single, organized army, and they were outside the control of the Seljuk leadership in Mesopotamia. A vigorous defense against these raiders was precluded by the destruction of Romanos IV's army at Manzikert, and the civil wars of the following ten years. The empire needed a flexible and aggressive defense against raiders who brought their own means of livelihood in the form of sheep, goat, and horse herds. Unlike Arab armies, Turkoman tribesmen were looking for pasturelands outside of their own

²³ Claude Cahen, "La Campagne de Mantzikert d'après les sources musulmanes," in *Byzantion* 9, (1934), 621-23. Vryonis, *Decline*, 148-55. Vryonis considers the Turkoman attacks and the Sultan's maneuvers as if they were part of an overall plan.

²⁴ On the Seljuks, see: Claude Cahen, *Turco-byzantina et Oriens Christianus* (London, 1974); Claude Cahen, *La Turquie pré-ottomane* (Istanbul, 1988); Carla L. Klausner, *The Seljuk Vezirate: A Study of Civil Administration, 1055-1194* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973.)

government's control. They were happy to winter or settle in areas of Anatolia considered inhospitable by the Byzantines. These upland grazing regions were located in the strategic center and center-west of the peninsula. The Byzantine military roads and supply points (*aplekta*) were located in this region. Pastoral cultures also possessed a military advantage over pre-gunpowder, agricultural settlers. Their economic base—sheep, goats, and horses—was easily moved and protected, while their opponent's source of livelihood, crops, were easy to destroy.²⁵ Large groups of pastoral nomads prevented trade and the transfer of surplus production to the central government.²⁶ Consequently, we must recognize two separate Turkish societies. The first was the Seljuk state, well organized and wealthy from the cities and productive capacity of Mesopotamia and Persia. The Byzantines recognized and negotiated with Ikonion, the vassal sultanate of the Seljuk Empire. The other society was composed of frontier Turkoman tribes who crossed the border as settlers or mercenaries. The Seljuk government shunned and distrusted them, so they sought opportunities in the quasi-steppe of central Anatolia. Successive Byzantine governments had difficulty understanding that the Seljuk government did not control this second group. Twenty years after Manzikert, Anatolian Turkomans controlled most of the land that the Crusaders called "Romania."²⁷

Political Overview

In the late tenth century Byzantium's eastern enemies were relatively weak Arab emirates such as Aleppo and the Hamdanid remnants. Capable generals such as Nikephoros Phokas, John Tzimiskes, and Basil II defeated these emirates. The Armenian principalities of the Van region were incorporated into the imperial military and political

²⁵ Hanson, Victor Davis, *The Western Way of War*, (New York, 1989), 33. Hanson disagrees, noting that to destroy vineyards with axes and hand weapons was a considerable task.

²⁶ Angold, 96-97.

²⁷ Rosalind Hill, ed. *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum: The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (London, 1962), 3. "Rum" is all the territory to the east of the Hellespont. Raymond D'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, ed. and tr. John and Laurita Hill (Philadelphia, 1968), 27. Here *Romania* designates everything outside of the emperor's territory, in other words, the land occupied by the Turks.

structure during the reigns of Basil II and Constantine VIII.²⁸ Bulgaria, which threatened Byzantine control of the Balkans during the early eleventh century, was obliterated by 1020. Imperial provinces in southern Italy—Apulia and Calabria—were stable, and the empire would soon attempt to re-conquer Sicily. The Rus appeared momentarily on the Byzantine military stage (989) but the rebellions that Basil II faced throughout his reign were a greater threat to imperial stability.²⁹ Romanos III Argyros avoided similar difficulties only by capitulating to the nobility and abrogating the land-laws of Basil and of Romanos Lekapenos.³⁰ Constantine's successors—Romanos III (1028–34), Michael IV (1034–41), Michael V (1041–42), Zoe and Theodora (1042)—had peaceful reigns because each was ineffectual, and none placed limits on power of either the provincial aristocracy or the bureaucracy of Constantinople. The pattern of civil war prevalent during the reign of Basil II again recurred, beginning with the reign of Constantine IX (1042–55), and it continued for another fifteen years until the accession of Alexios I in 1081.³¹

The civil wars between 1071 and 1081 caused the loss of Italy and Asia Minor. When Alexios' coup succeeded in 1081, the empire had two new enemies established on imperial territory. First, Seljuk Turks ruled from Nicaea, and dominated western Asia Minor, while the Normans controlled southern Italy and sought *Lebensraum* to the east in Epiros and other Byzantine territory in the Balkans. Hungary had also begun to expand its power into traditional Byzantine

²⁸ Ferdinand Chalandon, *Essai sur le règne d'Alexius Ier Comnène (1081–1118)*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1900), I, 9–10.

²⁹ Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris, 1990), 27–37. There were nine important rebellions after Basil II reached adulthood and took complete control of the empire, including those of Bardas Skleros (976–79), Basil Lekapenos (986), Bardas Phokas (987–89), Bardas Skleros (987–89), John Malakenos (996), Meles (1009–19), George Tzoulas (1016), N. Gabras (1018), and Nikephoros Phokas (1022).

³⁰ Ostrogorsky, 322–23. Note that the existence of land-laws does not imply a strong peasantry, but only a method for emperors to exert control over the nobility. This was a legal trip-wire that allowed an emperor to smash the power of any noble who he believed was becoming too powerful. Paul Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium: From the Origins to the Twelfth Century* (Galway, 1979), 115–56, 269–70. He discusses the landed property of the stratiotes, and provides an index of legal sources.

³¹ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, 57–90. These rebellions include: Leo Tornikes, George Maniakes, Isaac Komnenos (1057–59), Nikephoros Botaneiates (1078–81), Nikephoros Bryennios, Nikephoros Melissenos, Alexios Komnenos (1081–18) (Rebels who became emperors have their regnal dates in parentheses).

spheres, such as Serbia and western Bulgaria. The arrival of the Pechenegs north of the Danube during the tenth century made trade and communication with the Rus difficult, while the increasing sophistication and naval power of the Venetian republic meant that after one thousand years of near monopoly, Byzantium no longer controlled the Adriatic and Ionian seas.

Byzantium's naval impotence was a fiscal inevitability. Nevertheless, an empire that consisted of the littoral of three disconnected seas—the Ionian, Aegean and Pontic—needed a fleet. Byzantium's lack of a navy in her home waters meant that Venice could regularly extort economic privileges, determine whether invaders, such as the Normans or Crusaders entered the empire, and parry any Byzantine attempts to restrict Venetian commercial or naval activity.³² A few examples will demonstrate this point. A powerful Byzantine fleet could have prevented a Norman invasion; instead of a decade of war, Alexios' reign could have been a decade of peace and rebuilding. A powerful fleet would have enabled the Byzantines to provision the Crusader kingdoms of Syria and Palestine, rather than leaving this important task in the hands of the Italian trading cities. Of course, pirate-lords like Tzachas of Smyrna would have been unable to threaten Alexios into making common cause with the empire's most dangerous enemy, Suleyman and the Seljuk state at Nicaea.

Several historiographical assumptions have bedeviled Western historians of this period. Most of these are assumptions about the “unchanging” nature of Byzantium, its “weakness” during this period, and the “economic destructiveness” of the Seljuk invasions. Most of these opinions are based on the emotionally charged and biased descriptions of authors such as Odo of Deuil and Ekhard of Aura, or upon narratives written during or just after the First Crusade. Unfortunately, historians of the Latin west have not pursued the Byzantine sources as effectively as Byzantinists have mined Crusader accounts. It is important to examine these misconceptions, as several

³² *Alexiade*, II, 52–54; (Bk. 6, ch. 5, ll. 5–10), Alexios' and the Venetians. Kinnamos, 281; (6., 10) CSHB for the conflict between John II and the Venetians. Kinnamos, 281–286; (6., 10) for Manuel's difficulties with the Venetians. See also: A.R. Gadolin, “Alexius I Comnenus and the Venetian Trade Privileges: A New Interpretation,” *Byzantion* 50: 1 (1980). The best monographic account of Byzantine relations with Venice is Donald M. Nicol's *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, 1988).

relate to the military history of late eleventh and twelfth-century Byzantium. Contemporary western sources unanimously condemn Byzantine forces as weak and ineffectual. The Byzantines are nearly absent from recent accounts of the First Crusade published by Jonathan Riley-Smith. Kenneth Setton's *A History of the Crusades* provides a more balanced account; the only general work that provides an integrated picture of Latin and Byzantine perceptions of the Crusades is Stephen Runciman's *A History of the Crusades*.³³ This lack of a good, general history that recognizes the importance of Byzantium fosters the impression among students of Western Europe that the study of Byzantium properly belongs with "other," non-western civilizations. Modern historians' selective choice of subject matter and source material has created this incorrect impression. Byzantium, however, was not an alien civilization to the Latin Crusaders, unlike the Arab principalities in Palestine.

Neither Byzantium nor Islam, however, was entirely alien to the Crusaders. By the late eleventh century pilgrims regularly traveled to the Holy Land.³⁴ When the brief persecution of pilgrims under the Fatamid caliph al-Hakim ended, travel eastward again became free of organized impediments. There is little evidence that the new Seljuk masters of Syria and Palestine harassed or abused pilgrims any more than the Arabs had. Pilgrimage was always a risky affair, and many pilgrims who survived returned in poverty.³⁵ Byzantium was an important way station on the pilgrimage routes from the mid-eleventh century onward, and remained so until the end of the thirteenth century and the Latin sack of Constantinople.

³³ *A History of the Crusades*, vol. I. *The First Hundred Years*, ed. Marshall W. Baldwin, (Madison, 1969), 289–304. Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History* (New Haven, 1987), Chapters 1 and 2 of Riley-Smith contain only passing references to the involvement of the Byzantine emperor in calling for and supporting the First Crusade. Stephen Runciman's, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. I. *The First Crusade* (Cambridge, 1951) contains the most balanced examination of the First Crusade from the perspective of the Byzantine Empire. Jonathan Riley-Smith's, *Atlas of the Crusades* (New York, 1991), considers the crusades separately from the idea of pilgrimage, and begins its treatment in 1095. Throughout there is little reference to the Byzantines.

³⁴ Runciman, 46–50.

³⁵ Runciman, 78–79. M.R.B. Shaw, ed., *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades* (1963), 273, provides an interesting example Joinville's negotiations to alleviate his financial problems. While this account is from the mid-thirteenth century, Jean de Joinville's problems supporting himself and a band of his knights mirror the problems of the members of the First Crusade. See *Gesta Francorum*, 33–34.

Nor was travel by westerners to and through Byzantium unusual. Historians have assumed that Byzantium's conflicts with the Crusaders were due, in part, to cultural misunderstanding bred by little contact. However, the sack of Constantinople in 1204 was the result of Byzantium's integral involvement in western politics and dynastic maneuvering. Also, the wars Alexios I fought against the Normans were natural extensions of the wars the Normans and Byzantines had fought in southern Italy during the previous thirty years. We can imagine that Robert Guiscard would have found another excuse for war, but his daughter had been betrothed to Constantine, the son of Michael VII. It was undoubtedly useful for Guiscard to maintain peace when his daughter would be the next empress of Byzantium. When the government of Alexios I ignored Helen, and when Constantine was betrothed to Alexios' daughter Anna, Guiscard had a convenient excuse for war. This is also an example of the ease with which Byzantium interacted, albeit unsuccessfully, with western states. The Byzantine policy of hiring mercenaries from among the Normans, English, and other westerners also belies the statement that there was little interaction between Byzantium and the west. Finally, Michael VII's negotiations with Gregory VII for a papal military mission resulted in Gregory's plan to accompany the expedition. Whether or not Gregory's intentions were serious, this plan was precluded by Gregory's involvement in the investiture struggle with the German Emperor Henry IV.³⁶

There is a natural tendency for the historian to project his own rationalistic approach upon confused decision-making situations. This temptation is great when examining the first ten years of Alexios' reign, when Byzantium's external relations were complicated by chaos in Anatolia, invasions by trans-Danubian tribes, and incessant warfare with the Normans. However, little coherent policy-making appears to have been present. Anna Komnene's often confused description of internal politics during Alexios' reign likely reflects the level of policy and decision-making of which Alexios was capable during the chaotic, early years of his reign. Alexios reacted to situations forced upon him; this is not policy-making. Likewise, the reign of Manuel provides ample information that belies the existence of rational

³⁶ Ute-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy* (Philadelphia, 1988). This is the clearest and most comprehensive short study of the conflict between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV of Germany.

policy.³⁷ Manuel frequently relied upon astrology to aid him in his decision-making,³⁸ and used new titles to bind officials to him. He also governed through relatives and personal associates, but did not examine the effects of this policy on the long-term stability of the empire.³⁹ In order to govern, Manuel needed the consent of his marriage-allies and of collateral branches of the Komnenian dynasty (witness lenient treatment of rebellious family members). It was this need, exacerbated by an increasingly complex international environment that led him to promote and forgive rather than to punish.⁴⁰ Andronikos Komnenos committed a variety of offences, including incompetence governing Cilicia; treasonous negotiations with Geza, the king of Hungary; and many other, smaller acts of *lèse majesté*. The emperor was unable to risk family censure by killing Andronikos. Manuel promoted friends and family members, and he used titles to control a system of family alliances that he needed in order to govern. But necessity is not the same thing as a deliberately chosen and reasoned policy. Historians, whose job is to examine patterns of evidence, often assume that policy was constantly present, rather than assuming that the history of a decade or two in a society was driven by expedient reaction to external events. Nevertheless, such ad hoc government by reaction was an integral feature of the Komnenian period, and to examine the evidence for military and strategic policy without taking this into account would be misleading.

³⁷ Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 44–48, 53–57. See Magdalino for a different opinion. Manuel, like his grandfather Alexios, often appears to be reacting to events outside of his control rather than formulating a coherent policy. Manuel's use of astrology should not be discounted when examining his decisions, (Magdalino, pp. 5–8). Kinnamos, 184, for the fall of Styppaiotes. See Kinnamos, 123–131, for Andronikos' adventures. Kinnamos, 265–270, for the fall of Alexios Axouch. Ostrogorsky, 346. Choniates, *Historia*, 111–13, for Styppaiotes.

Choniates, *Historia*, 103–8, 129–32, 138–42, for Andronikos. Choniates, *Historia*, 143–6, for Alexios Axouch.

³⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 95–6, 153–4, 220–2.

³⁹ The rebellion of Andronikos, the fall of Styppaiotes, and the removal of Alexios Axouch were events that would have been hard to imagine during the reign of Manuel's grandfather, Alexios. Manuel seems to have delegated power to a much greater extent than his grandfather did, and not always wisely. Unlike Alexios I, he did not have a core group of relatives and followers who were completely trustworthy.

⁴⁰ Magdalino, 186–87, 192. Angold, 125.

Military Overview

The military system of Basil II and his several predecessors had functioned as follows: The empire's heartland in the east was protected by the Armenian buffer states, as well as by vassal princes in Syria. The empire fortified border cities such as Antioch, Edessa, Kaisareia, and Melitene. An invader who passed these obstacles would then have to breach the passes of the Taurus Mountains. Anatolia's interior, through which any invader would have to move, was dry and barren, with the great fortress cities of Amorion and Dorylaion upon its western boundary. *Thematic* troops stationed in the border *themes* provided ready manpower either for harassing actions against an invader, or for fighting in field actions. If an invasion warranted it, the emperor could employ the *tagmata*, which were stationed in the capital. Furthermore, a powerful fleet maintained control over the coastlands and islands of the Aegean, Adriatic, Pontic, and eastern Mediterranean littoral.

In contrast to this system, replete with defensive barriers, was the Komnenian system. Asia Minor was lost by the beginning of Alexios' reign, with only a few bastions such as Sinope, Trebizond, and Cyprus remaining under imperial control. Tzachas of Smyrna produced a pirate fleet that ravaged the Aegean against ineffectual Byzantine resistance. Even after the restoration of imperial control over the Asia Minor coast following the First Crusade, the empire remained on the strategic defensive. For the second half of Alexios' reign, and through the following two reigns, the imperial defensive system relied upon playing off aggressive Turkish leaders against each other, and fighting as a last resort. The Komnenian emperors had no buffers between them and their enemies. They no longer held ranges of mountains with narrow passes to stall or confine raids. They had few well-fortified cities. The *themes* and their men were no more, and now only the reconstituted remnants of the *tagmata*, supplemented by European levies, were available for defense. This was a much less resilient system, and one that placed emphasis upon meeting an enemy in pitched battle, always a dangerous prospect. The Turks were a formidable enemy in such a fight, but the everyday problem was more with the Turkoman raiders, and the Komnenian system did little other than threaten them. Armies, as opposed to soldiers stationed in provinces, can defeat raiders by virtue of sheer numbers, but cannot prevent them from returning once the soldiers have

left. This was the essential problem that confronted the Komnenian emperors: protecting territories against constant incursion with an army called up for temporary duty. It was a problem that Alexios, John, and Manuel never solved.

The Campaigns

In 1081, when Alexios I seized the throne, the empire had narrowed to its smallest territorial extent in its history. Because of circumscribed imperial frontiers and constant invasions, Alexios' campaigns were almost exclusively defensive. His negotiation to have Sulcyman, the sultan of Nicaea, betray his rival and father-in-law Tzachas, the lord of Smyrna, for example, was a stopgap measure that avoided having to direct resources eastward when a larger problem—the Norman invasion—loomed in the west. Alexios was forced to allow a hostile Turkish state, the Seljuk sultanate, to become established at Nicaea, one of the great Christian cities of Asia Minor. In hindsight, the establishment of the Seljuk state in Asia Minor was the seminal event of Alexios' reign. However, imperial preoccupation with the Normans prevented Alexios from paying attention to his eastern territories.

Alexios fought his first major war against Robert Guiscard and the Normans of South Italy. Following the rebellion and death of George Maniakes in 1043, Byzantine control over Italy had slowly deteriorated. The last Byzantine outpost, Bari, was lost in 1071, the same year as the battle of Manzikert. Robert Guiscard then negotiated an agreement with Michael VII that the Norman's daughter Helena would marry Michael's heir Constantine. This was an admirable solution to the problem of a militant Norman state just across the Ionian Sea. However, Michael VII was deposed, and his successor, Nikephoros III Botaneiates, was himself dethroned by Alexios I in 1081.

The events following Alexios' accession are unclear. Initially, it appeared that Alexios would discard his wife, Irene Doukas, for the empress Maria, wife of the former emperor Botaneiates. During these negotiations, Constantine, Maria's son, had his position as heir confirmed by Alexios. The earlier betrothal of Guiscard's daughter Helen to Constantine was ignored, (Anna Komnene was eventually betrothed to Constantine), giving Guiscard an excuse to attack the empire. He

used a monk who claimed to be Michael VII to create a pretender, a pseudo-Michael VII, to draw support away from Alexios. He then transported an army across the Adriatic Sea and besieged Dyrrachion.⁴¹ We will examine the details of Alexios' defeat at Dyrrachion in 1081, in our discussion of his tactics and strategy. It is sufficient to note here that the battle marked a turning point in the development of the eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine army. The defeat was so catastrophic that Alexios lost most of the army he inherited from Botaneiates. Although Alexios never won a battle against Robert Guiscard, when the emperor allied with Henry IV of Germany the Normans were forced to return to Italy. Pakourianos, the *grand domestic*, remained with the imperial army while Alexios returned to Constantinople. While Robert attempted to stabilize his holdings in southern Italy, his son Bohemond continued to attack the empire, pressing southward into Thessaly. Several skirmishes occurred. Anna Komnene attempts to present these battles as victories, but they end with Alexios' forces in retreat. Finally, Alexios managed to bribe some of the Norman officers. Short of cash with which to pay these men, Bohemond retreated to the coast. The Venetian and Byzantine fleets seized the initiative and drove the Normans from their stronghold on Kerkyra. Bohemond retreated to Italy in 1084.

The Pechenegs

Between 1089 and 1092 Alexios fought another war, this time against the Pechenegs and Cumans. The Pechenegs were a Turkic people who first appear in Byzantine sources in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De Administrando Imperio*.⁴² In 1047 they crossed the Danube River and raided much of Bulgaria north of the Haimos Mountains. Reacting to the weakened state of imperial authority along the Danube frontier, they penetrated imperial territory several times a year between 1089 and 1092. The Pechenegs presented an entirely different set of military problems than did the Normans. The Normans were dangerous in an open field-battle, where their superior discipline and highly trained cavalry repeatedly defeated their Byzantine

⁴¹ *Alexiade*, I. 143-45; (4., 1., 1.1-4). Zonaras, III, 734, 17 to 735, 9.

⁴² Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, tr. R.J.H. Jenkins (Washington, 1967), 49-57, 167-175.

counterparts. The Pechenegs were simply difficult to bring to battle. Alexios crossed the Haimos Mountains several times to fight them, most notably at Great Preslav.⁴³ But the mountains were not high enough to present a serious barrier to invasion; the Pechenegs soon extended their pillaging to Thrace, the empire's heartland. In 1091, at Lebounion, Alexios and his Cuman allies decisively defeated the Pechenegs, but the Cumans soon turned against Alexios and constituted a threat of their own.⁴⁴

Alexios had to modify his tactics when fighting light-armed, agile mounted opponents like the Pechenegs and Cumans. The campaigns against these mounted steppe-warriors provided a training ground for the second Norman war, which was fought against Bohemond between 1105 and 1108. In this campaign Alexios ordered the Byzantine army to refuse to fight a field battle against the more effective Norman cavalry. Instead, the emperor denied them supplies and matériel by blocking the passes around their base at Dyrrachion. This strategy was successful, and the Treaty of Devol, forced upon Bohemond in 1108, marked the end of the Norman threat during Alexios' reign. It also marked the point at which we can say that Alexios had developed a new army, and new tactical doctrines with which to use it. The Treaty of Devol was not a political success for the Byzantines. It traded Bohemond's freedom for a titular overlordship of southern Italy that could never be effective, and for an occupation of Antioch that could never be carried out.⁴⁵ One of the treaty's benefits was that it provided the legal basis for imperial claims to that city during the reigns of John II and Manuel I.

Antioch, the great Christian center of Syria, and the largest Orthodox city outside of Constantinople, was the centerpiece of much imperial policy for the next seventy years. The empire did not have coherent eastern policy before the Crusaders arrived and gave Alexios the opportunity to regain the coastal provinces of Asia Minor. The emperor fought by proxy, using the Seljuk sultan Suleyman against Tzachas, and then using the Danishmendid Turks against Suleyman. Before the arrival of the Crusades, Alexios did not even try to control the Asiatic cities closest to Constantinople. When the crusaders reached Constantinople in the summer of 1096, Alexios

⁴³ *Alexiade*, II, 93-98, (7., 3., 1.1).

⁴⁴ *Alexiade*, II, 189, (10., 2., H). Zonaras, III, 744, 5-15.

⁴⁵ *Alexiade*, III, 125-139, (13., 12., 1.1-28). Zonaras, III, 750, 4-14.

used them against the Seljuks. To influence their decisions and to take possession of cities they stormed, Alexios ordered a unit commanded by his general Tatikios to accompany the crusading army to Antioch. Tatikios deserted the Crusaders outside Antioch, and this was used by Bohemond as an excuse to seize the city for himself, in violation of the agreements he had made with the emperor in distant Constantinople.

Following the settlement of the Norman and Pecheneg problems in the west (after 1108), the emperor was finally able to turn his attention to eastern matters. This attention resulted in several campaigns between 1112 and 1116, in which the emperor attempted to impose imperial control over western Asia Minor. These campaigns were not successful. Alexios was able to resettle only a few groups of captive Byzantine citizens within the imperial frontier, but these military actions demonstrate that by 1112 the empire had successfully re-established control over the western and southern coastlands of Asia Minor. Control of Antioch and the re-establishment of an imperial frontier on the Euphrates River, prerequisites for extending imperial control over central Anatolia, required a clear communication and supply route across Asia Minor. Alexios failed to establish control over the land routes east, and John II and Manuel I also failed in this. However, historians should recognize that expeditions against the Seljuks at Ikonion, as well as campaigns to fortify and reinforce the Euphrates frontier, were usually directed at controlling Antioch, and were not aims in themselves.

By 1118, the date of John II's accession to the throne, the territorial integrity of the Byzantine Empire had been re-established. Its borders stretched from the highlands of southern Serbia, to the Danube, to the edges of the central Anatolian plateau. Its permanent form, including the integral association of the Turks with Anatolia, had been decided. Because of this relative stability, John had the luxury of engaging in aggressive campaigns. While territorial gains were not significant considering the effort expended, particularly with respect to Antioch, the empire usually fought on enemy territory, rather than on imperial lands. This was a distinct improvement in Byzantium's strategic position relative to the position of the Turks, Normans, and Hungarians.

Military activity during John II's reign can be divided into three phases. From 1118 until 1128 John stabilized the empire's Danube frontier. This included successful campaigns against the Pechenegs

(in 1122), the Serbians, and the Hungarians, who had begun to challenge the empire's hegemony over the Dalmatian coast and Danubian border territories (1128). The empire's alliance with Venice (entered into by Alexios in 1082), had been used against the Norman kingdom of Sicily; when Sicily no longer appeared to be a threat, John abrogated his father's treaty with the Venetian Republic. John's second phase of military activity began with a rapprochement with the Venetians in 1126. This rapprochement was a necessity because the emperor intended to turn east and begin the considerable task of controlling the distant, mountainous province of Cilicia, as well as extending the imperial frontier deeper into Turkish territory. Between 1130 and 1138 John campaigned against Kastamonu and Gangra, accompanied by an extensive siege train; during John's reign the Danishmendid emirs of northeast Anatolia appeared to be a greater threat than the Seljuks at Ikonion. Six years of campaigning resulted only in the acquisition of Kastamonou and its surrounding territory.

Leo, the Roupenid prince of Armenian Cilicia had spent this time wresting territory from the control of local imperial commanders. John's campaign of 1137 against Leo was successful, and Leo submitted quickly, as did Prince Raymond of Antioch, although Raymond's submission was due largely to threats against Antioch mounted by Zangi of Aleppo, a powerful Turkish *atabeg*. In 1138 John campaigned in Syria but accomplished nothing, and while returning through Antioch his army's looting resulted in a popular revolt; the people of Antioch besieged the emperor in the citadel. Over the next two years, 1141–42, John laid the groundwork for a more extensive campaign to Cilicia and Syria. He fortified the Sangarios frontier, and established lines of communication between the Maiander valley and Attalicia, the major Byzantine port on the south Anatolian coast. John's suspicious death in 1143 from a poisoned arrow wound brought his son Manuel to the throne.

John's reign produced limited military successes for the empire; a meagre return for an emperor who fought annual campaigns. In the west, John defended the Danube frontier against Turkic raiders, while Hungary was foiled in its attempt to extend its control south, to the Adriatic Sea. In the east, where John waged offensive campaigns, his gains were more limited. John managed to preserve Byzantine territory against the Danishmendid emirs but made few advances

against them. He fortified the Byzantine frontier with Ikonion, but was unable to expand that frontier onto the central Anatolian plateau; the old Byzantine fortified points of Amorion, Dorylaion and Ikonion remained in Turkish hands. The Euphrates frontier remained weakly held. Byzantine control remained dependent upon the emperor's presence in Cilicia to overawe the Armenian princes. The empire that Manuel inherited from his father was therefore little different from that which his father had inherited from Alexios. In the west, the Normans were quiescent, but Hungary remained a military threat. The Danishmendids were reduced in power, but the Seljuks of Ikonion were stronger. Also, relative to the growing power of Ikonion, the kingdom of Hungary and the German empire, the Byzantine Empire was weaker than it had been in Alexios' day. It is this relative weakness that we must keep in mind when we examine Manuel's diplomatic efforts. The world of Alexios was one in which the Byzantines and Latins fought major wars for the first time. Manuel's world was one in which war and conflict with western states was a constant threat.

Manuel's empire had relatively stable military frontiers. Trade with the Pisans, Amalfitans, Genoese, and especially the Venetians helped re-establish the economic prosperity that the invasions of the late eleventh century had ruined.⁴⁶ In his policy Manuel first attempted (unsuccessfully) to complete his father's work in the east by seizing Antioch. He then turned west, launching an unsuccessful invasion of southern Italy. He fought inconclusive wars with the Hungarian kingdom. At the end of his reign, like his grandfather, he attempted to placate public opinion by attacking the Seljuk sultanate. This resulted in the defeat at Myriokephalon of the largest army mustered by any Komnenian emperor. One might even say that Manuel squandered the gains accumulated by his father and grandfather.

Unlike the military events of John's reign, Manuel's military endeavors do not fall into geographically and chronologically discrete periods of activity. Manuel began his reign with a campaign in Anatolia that brought him to the suburbs of Ikonion in 1146, but he encountered serious difficulties when forced to retreat after ravaging the

⁴⁶ *Alexiade*, I, 145–46, (4., 2., 1.1–3). Nicol, Donald M. *Byzantium and Venice: a study in diplomatic and cultural relations* (Cambridge, 1992). 60–63.

territory around the Seljuk capital.⁴⁷ As with all Komnenian campaigns, one should note that within one day's march from the Maiander valley, the emperor was in a foreign land, without local support. Following this brief military display, Manuel was forced to support the crusade of Louis VII and Conrad III, launched in response to the fall of Edessa to the emir Zangi in 1144. Like the First Crusade, the second arrived piecemeal. Conrad III appeared outside Constantinople in 1147, and immediately western and Byzantine troops clashed near the walls of the imperial city. The imperial troops were successful in this encounter, and the Germans crossed the Bosphoros into Asia. Marching east of Dorylaion, they were attacked and defeated by the Seljuks, and turned back. Louis' forces arrived later and received a more cordial welcome, and also took the more leisurely and better-protected route down the coast and across southwestern Anatolia to Attaleia, joined by the remnants of Conrad's army. Manuel's naval support at Attaleia, where the Byzantines were supposed to meet the Crusaders, proved insufficient. The Byzantines were only able to ship the greater barons to the Holy Land. The Seljuks destroyed the army's infantry while it was marching overland to Syria. One of the most interesting aspects about the Second Crusade is Niketas Choniates' attitude toward the emperor's "support" of the Crusade. Choniates was disgusted by the emperor's treatment of the crusaders, accusing him of minting debased coins with which to pay them, and of ordering the adulteration of bread with lime.⁴⁸ Although these sentiments may not represent the opinion of the average Byzantine, the assumption of Odo of Deuil and the westerners, that Byzantine support was half-hearted and conditional, appears to have been justified.

Manuel spent 1155 managing the passage of the German and French of Crusaders across Asia Minor. During this interval, Roger II of Sicily took advantage of the emperor's preoccupation to seize Kerkyra, an island that lay off the west coast of Epiros. This was a natural staging point for any expedition against Hellas or Epiros. Roger then raided the prosperous cities Corinth, Thebes and Athens

⁴⁷ Kinnamos, 39–44, for Manuel's first campaign against Ikonion, and 299–300, for preparations for the second campaign.

See Choniates, *Historia*, 52–53, for the first campaign (1146); and 177–91 for Myriokephalon (1176).

⁴⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 66–67.

in the *theme* of Hellas.⁴⁹ Throughout the reigns of Alexios and his predecessors (1025–1118), these two provinces remained military backwaters. Increased economic and military contacts with the west, however, meant that these provinces, located on the naval route to Constantinople, assume a greater degree of prominence in our sources.⁵⁰ The Venetians recognized the strategic value of the ports on the coast of the Peloponnesos. When John expelled them in 1122, they attempted to take the port of Monemvasia, and after the sack of Constantinople in 1204, they seized most of the important ports of central and southern Hellas. The Sicilians did not want military outposts or permanent control over Hellas and the Peloponnesos; this expedition appears to have been a form of economic warfare. At Corinth, weavers, dyers, and young women were seized and transported to Roger's kingdom. This occurred despite an adequate garrison in the city, and despite the powerful fortifications of the citadel. Choniates reports that the incompetence of the imperial commanders accounted for the Italian successes, rather than lack of preparation or surprise.

Kerkyra was crucial to imperial defensive planning; it was a potential staging point for expeditions against Epiros and south into Hellas. Control of Kerkyra would do much to prevent Norman raids on Greece. Norman control of Kerkyra, moreover, was a direct challenge to Venetian naval hegemony in the Adriatic. Following Venice's commercial agreement with Alexios I (1082), the Venetians had become the predominant naval force in the eastern Mediterranean. John II was unable to challenge their naval power; he was forced as a consequence to restore them to their position of favor after four years of conflict.⁵¹ If the Sicilians continued to hold Kerkyra, they could run patrols between Apulia and Epiros. It also meant that they could potentially block the Venetian trading fleets, all of which

⁴⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 74–76.

⁵⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 73. The Normans next tried to take the fortified town of Monemvasia, off the east coast of the Peloponnesos. It proved too strong for them. Kinnamos does not mention this event.

⁵¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 172–74. Choniates does not mention John's war with Venice; he analyzes Manuel's decision to confiscate Venetian goods as a reaction to their earlier lampooning of the emperor at Kerkyra. Choniates, *Historia*, 86. Note 'fire-bearing ships,' '*nees pyrophoroi*' (νῆες πυρφόροι) p. 172, l. 73, sent after the fleeing Venetians. Kinnamos, 281–82. See 281–86, for Manuel's military actions against the Venetians, including the use of Greek fire (283).

had to pass Kerkyra and Apulia. Roger's actions threatened the Venetians more than they threatened the Byzantine Empire. The Venetians had very good reason to ally with Manuel against the Normans, and accordingly mounted an expedition against the Normans in Kerkyra, in 1147-48. A sudden Cuman invasion meant that Manuel could not give this expedition his full attention. By 1149, despite the uninspired leadership of Stephen Kontostephanos, and a quarrel between the Byzantines and their Venetian allies that came to blows, it was apparent to the Norman garrison that the combined imperial and Venetian fleets would continue to prevent any Norman relief force from coming to their aid. The garrison surrendered and the officers in charge promptly entered service with Manuel.⁵²

Manuel now turned his military policy towards the west. Despite several brief interludes of military activity in the east, including the 1167 expedition to Egypt, Manuel's policy became directed towards controlling the Dalmatian coast and southern Italy. It is a mistake to consider Manuel's Italian and Hungarian policies separately. Manuel hired armies in Italy; these distracted Roger II. Manuel's outposts in that kingdom prevented Norman raids by forcing Roger to concentrate upon his Italian possessions. Like Roger when he conquered Kerkyra, Manuel sought staging areas for further action, and outposts for the naval domination of the straits of Dyrrachion. Simultaneously, Manuel mounted expeditions against Serbia and Hungary. To forestall the annual Hungarian advances into Dalmatia and Byzantine Serbia, between 1151 and 1167 the Byzantines sent thirteen expeditions against the Hungarians.⁵³ These wars culminated in the extensive campaign in which the Byzantine army invaded Hungary, and in 1167 Andronikos Kontostephanos defeated the Hungarian army at Semlin. Manuel failed to maintain the gains his armies had made in the Norman kingdom in Italy, but by 1158 military conflict had been replaced by a policy of rapprochement with the Normans and with an alliance against Frederick I Barbarossa, the emperor of Germany. By 1167 Manuel had achieved many of his military goals in the west: Byzantine power now extended further west than it had at any time since the reign of Basil II; The emperor had rights con-

⁵² Choniates, *Historia*, 88-89; Kinnamos, 96-101. The officers undoubtedly felt that their dogged defense would win them better terms of employment from Manuel than they would receive from Roger, whose fortress they had just surrendered.

⁵³ Angold, 174.

cerning the disposition of the Hungarian crown; Byzantine relations with the papacy, now represented by Alexander III, were cordial;⁵⁴ The emperor had also managed to fight the Normans to a stand-still, and they posed no threat to Manuel for the remainder of his reign.

Following these policy gains, Manuel embarked upon a new set of ambitious policies which threatened to overturn much of what he had accomplished over the first twenty five-years of his reign. First, in 1171, he attempted to abrogate Venice's trading privileges within the Byzantine Empire. The immediate cause of this action was the Venetian sack of the Genoese trading offices in Constantinople. Manuel, quite obviously, did not want two Italian trading states fighting a private war in his capital.⁵⁵ Manuel was worried because Venetians who married Byzantines, becoming in effect Byzantines themselves, retained the privileges granted to "foreign" traders. Angold and Hendy argue that there were far fewer of these traders than most historians assume, numbering in the thousands rather than the tens of thousands, even in the capital. Nevertheless, it is natural to assume that the emperor, sensitive to the granting of privileges and rights—perhaps the greatest representation of imperial prerogatives and power—would want to control a rogue group of citizens who remained under the laws and control of a foreign power while maintaining themselves as economically privileged citizens of the emperor. The agreement by which Alexios extended trading privileges to the Venetians also specified that they would resolve disputes in their own courts. The emperor saw the Venetians who married Byzantines in the Orthodox rite as Orthodox Byzantines who wished to remain outside the emperor's authority. Manuel's war with the Venetians was mainly fought on the sea, and resembled the similar situation John II instigated. This conflict lasted from 1171 until 1175, when the emperor decided that fighting a naval war was too expensive.

Between 1171 and 1175, Manuel also attempted to affect a rapprochement with Frederick I Barbarossa. This became necessary because Manuel's diplomacy with Alexander III, directed against Frederick, and Manuel's support of the League of Verona against the German empire, became irrelevant after plague swept through

⁵⁴ *ODB*, I, 57. In 1167 Manuel sent the *sebastos* Iordanos to negotiate with Alexander III. The substance of the negotiations was that Manuel would organize a union of churches if Alexander recognized him as emperor of both east and west.

⁵⁵ Magdalino, 93-94, 137-38; Angold, 199-201.

Frederick's army in 1167, and the German threat to Italy disappeared. The Byzantines were bitterly disillusioned by the sudden change in papal policy, and when negotiations with Frederick proved useless, the emperor found himself isolated both from the papacy and from the German emperor. Manuel still had influence in Hungary, but the emperor's policy of controlling the balance of power in the west, against whoever threatened to control Italy, was now a failure. In the context of these failures, Manuel turned eastward against Ikonion and the Seljuks.

Following his first attack upon Ikonion, in 1146, Manuel had personally led only one major campaign in the east, in 1158. He usually relied upon his vassals and proxies in Antioch, and upon generals such as Alexios Axouch, sent to Syria in 1164 in response to the defeat of Bohemond III of Antioch by Nur ed-din. In 1173 Frederick Barbarossa negotiated with Kilij Arslan, the Seljuk sultan; these negotiations between Manuel's two great enemies appeared to threaten a combined attack from both east and west upon the empire. The next year Manuel began preparations for his largest campaign in Anatolia. In 1175, he wrote to Pope Alexander III, stating that the route to the Holy Land was open because he had captured and fortified Dorylaion. This was a thinly disguised invitation for the pope to send bands of crusaders at precisely the time that Manuel was planning the destruction of the Seljuk state.⁵⁶ The emperor spent most of 1175 fortifying Soublaion and organizing diversionary expeditions to Amaseia and Neokaisareia. He developed a large siege train, which undoubtedly was one of the reasons the army proved so unwieldy in its advance up the Maiander valley.⁵⁷ The effects of the defeat the emperor suffered at Myriokephalon in 1176 were limited to the international perception of imperial weakness. In fact, Manuel only disabled his advanced base at Soublaion, constructed the year before. He retained control of the fortress of Dorylaion, right on the Seljuk border, although his truce with Kilij Arslan required its destruction. Consequently, in 1177, the Seljuks sent 20,000 men into the Byzantine controlled Maiander valley. The Byzantines handily defeated this expedition. Therefore, the battle of Myriokephalon had very little effect upon the eastern military fron-

⁵⁶ Angold, 189.

⁵⁷ Michael Hendy describes the battle of Myriokephalon, citing Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. W. Stubbs, 4 vols. (London, 1868-71), II, 103.

tier. Nevertheless, it was the most significant military force mustered in Manuel's reign. It was also unique because it was the only campaign in which Manuel sought to destroy an enemy, rather than to influence or intimidate an opponent.

The failure of Myriokephalon was not an indication of Byzantine weakness, but rather an indication of the limitations of warmaking against the Turks. These limits had always been present. John II had been equally unsuccessful in his attempt to destroy the Danishmendids. Manuel's military activities continued after 1176, despite the emperor's personal absence from any further campaigning. A large fleet attacked Egypt the next year, and imperial armies continued to campaign in Anatolia. That these were defensive wars is not any after-effect of Myriokephalon, but simply a reflection of the fact that most imperial campaigns in Anatolia were defensive in nature.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CAMPAIGNS OF ALEXIOS I KOMNENOS (1081-1118)

The army Alexios inherited from Nikephoros Botaneiates in 1081 was in deplorable condition. The army of Romanos IV in 1071 had at least possessed ample numbers of recruits and an experienced general. Alexios' army initially contained few Anatolian recruits while European recruits were drawn from only two areas: Thrace and Macedonia. Pecheneg and Cuman raids made control over Bulgaria problematic during large portions of Alexios' reign. Furthermore, the defection of Serbia in the 1070s, the invasions of the Norman lords Robert Guiscard and Bohemond, and the piratical raids of the Turk Tzachas ensured that large parts of the empire's European territories were under foreign control for many years. Greece, called *Hellas* by the Byzantines, was not a viable source of recruits, in part, perhaps, because it was difficult to move men from so far south to where they were needed in the north and west. Thrace and Macedonia had the critical advantage of being close to the capital, and were protected by the Haimos Mountains, which blocked northern invaders.

Another problem for the development of a new army was the uncertain allegiance of soldiers who, during the 1070s, had participated in several rebellions. Nikephoros Bryennios, *Doux* of Dyrrachion, rebelled with much of the western army in 1077. Nikephoros Botaneiates rebelled and became emperor in 1078. Upon Nikephoros Bryennios' defeat and capture by Alexios, Nikephoros Basilakios gathered Bryennios' rebellious troops and continued the struggle against the new emperor Botaniates. Nikephoros Melissenos, who rebelled in 1080, disrupted what remained of Asia Minor. Roussel of Bailleul carved out a principality for himself in Asia Minor in 1073.¹ Alexios himself rebelled successfully and in 1081 obtained the throne.

¹ Anne Comnène, *Alexiade* (Paris, 1937-76), ed. B. Leib., I, 10-11. Alexios captured Roussel by bribing Roussel's Turkish allies to seize him and sell him to the emperor.

Campaigns against Rebels

Anna Komnene's remarks about her father's first campaign reinforce the impression that the army was in terrible condition. She says, "... the empire of the Romans had been reduced to its last resources. In the East the armies were everywhere scattered, while the Turks had spread out so that they had all the near territories... But in the west [the troops] flowed to Bryennios."² The soldiers available to Alexios constituted a meager force compared with the powerful armies of Basil II. Alexios' army included the Immortals, three hundred Chomatenes, and a few Kelts (Frankish mercenaries). Botaneiates also sent for men from his Turkish allies.³ Alexios advanced to the Halmyros River, where it became apparent that the large size of Basilakios' army made a pitched battle undesirable. Anna mentions that Alexios deliberately held his army off from Nikephoros' troops because he was afraid the rebel would attack if he realized how few men Alexios had under his command.⁴

The grandson of the rebel Bryennios was Nikephoros the Caesar. He became Anna Komnene's husband, and is Anna's source for this campaign, which occurred before she was born. By the time Anna wrote, in the 1140s, few were living who could have recalled these events. Her precise description of Alexios' military preparations paraphrases Bryennios, and Bryennios' reports of military events are usually detailed.⁵

Alexios fought Bryennios at the Halmyros River. Bryennios placed his brother John on the right wing with five thousand men. These

² *Alexiade*, I, 17-18, (I, 4. 1.10-19). The combined Byzantine forces included both Alexios and Bryennios' men. If Alexios had enough men to take the field, but a somewhat smaller force than Bryennios (which might explain his reluctance to give battle), we can estimate the entire Byzantine military contingent in the west at between twenty thousand and twenty-five thousand men. This is admittedly guesswork, but such is the nature of Anna's account.

³ *Alexiade*, I, 18. Nikephoros Bryennios, *Nicephore Bryennios Histoire, Hyle Historias*, CFHB, ed. P. Gautier (Brussels, 1975), 138.

⁴ *Alexiade*, I, 19.

⁵ *Alexiade*, I, 18 ff.; Bryennios, 136-38.

included the veterans of Maniakes from Sicily, and Thessalian and Frankish cavalry. The left consisted of three thousand men of the Macedonian and Thracian squadrons. Bryennios held the center with Thracians, Macedonians, and picked Thessalian cavalry troopers. No number is specified, but if the army was organized in three groups there is no reason to suppose there were fewer than three thousand in this center group also. Beyond the left flank, Bryennios stationed some Scythian allies, some two stades off.⁶ Facing him, Alexios' forces are reported by both Bryennios and Anna to have been considerably smaller. Nikephoros says that Alexios watched the enemy force approach and was dismayed by their overwhelming numbers.⁷ Alexios decided he had to fight although the Turkish mercenaries had not yet arrived. Alexios' force was both less disciplined and numerically inferior to that of his opponents, but strong enough to offer some hope of victory. If Bryennios had about twelve thousand men it is reasonable to assume somewhat fewer for Alexios, perhaps eight to ten thousand. Fewer men than this might seem foolhardy but we do not know what pressure was being placed upon Alexios to fight.

Alexios' line consisted of two groups, a left flank of Franks and Immortals (*athanatoi*) under his own command, and a right containing troops from the Choma region and some Turks.⁸ These were ordered to keep an eye on the Scythians, on the left side of Bryennios' line. The third part of Alexios' army, of unlisted composition but perhaps composed of *peltasts* (light-armed assault infantry), was off Alexios' left, hidden in some hollows for an ambush. The position of Alexios' Immortals and Franks at the outset of the battle is not stated, nor is the disposition of Alexios' other forces given in any detail. Their positions, however, become clear during the course of the action. Anna reports that John Bryennios struck down a soldier from the corps of 'The Immortals' facing him, and this tells us where they were relative to Bryennios' forces.⁹ We can place Alexios' contingent on the left, facing the powerful right flank of Bryennios' army.

⁶ Bryennios, 136.

⁷ Bryennios, 136-37.

⁸ The Immortals first appear during the reign of John I Tzimiskes, in 971. They were a cavalry regiment that lasted until the wars of the Normans during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118). See Hans-Joachim Kuhn, *Die byzantinische Armee im 10. Und 11. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1991), 243-46.

⁹ *Alexiade*, I, 20-21.

Alexios hoped that the soldiers he had placed in ambush would throw Bryennios' formation into confusion so that his Franks and Immortals would be able to break them. Nikephoros' best men faced Alexios' ambush, and it was easily driven off. Next Alexios' Immortals broke. A general rout followed. Alexios' Franks deserted to Bryennios, and the rest of the units under Alexios' personal command retreated.¹⁰ Bryennios' Scythians then attacked and drove off Alexios' right flank, and the whole imperial force fled beyond its camp, which the Scythians and the rest of Bryennios' army began to loot. By chance, a group of Alexios' Turkish allies arrived and reinforced his troops. They skirmished with the enemy and quickly drew Bryennios' victorious, overconfident troops into an ambush.¹¹ Alexios had remained on the field of battle, and in command of at least a unit of his men. Bryennios allowed his troops to loot, and he lost control of them. Alexios took advantage of his opponent's momentary lapse to capture Bryennios and win the battle.

It is clear from this account that the Byzantine army was composed primarily of Byzantine recruits. The striking arm of Alexios' force was Frankish cavalry supported by the Immortals. For purposes of determining total Byzantine numbers and ethnic composition, we must consider the whole force of both sides at the Battle of the Halmyros River as the "Byzantine" army. European recruits dominated this force; Chomatenes are the only Asian soldiers mentioned by Anna. The rest of the Byzantine troops were Macedonian, Thessalian, and Thracian (native Byzantine) cavalry. These regions were relatively protected from outside raiding and ravaging and were close enough to the capital to allow a speedy call-up of forces.

This army was a combined-arms force. It utilized a combination of infantry and cavalry, operating in support of each other. Macedonian and Thessalian cavalry units were protected by heavy armor: helmets and breastplates,¹² and are later identified by Anna as

¹⁰ Bryennios, 138. *Alexiade*, I, 24.

¹¹ *Alexiade*, I, 25. (I, 6, l. 21 ff.) When it at first appeared that Bryennios had won, Alexios stayed on the field of battle as long as possible. He was undoubtedly unenthusiastic about returning to Constantinople after a military defeat. He then met a force of his Turkish allies, and Alexios and these Turkish troops moved against Bryennios' forces. At first they engaged the enemy, then they pretended to flee in order to draw the enemy into an ambush.

¹² *Alexiade*, I, 20.

kataphraktoi.¹³ It contained *peltasts* (fast-moving, elite infantry), missile men, and spearmen. Alexios' army outside of Constantinople, during his rebellion, contained these classes of infantrymen, so we know that they existed and were used in Byzantine armies. The best cavalry and infantry were in the center, the other troops presumably on the flanks. The light archers and slingers (*psiloi*), were drawn up separately, although our sources do not specify where they were stationed.

Alexios' army operated around a base line of heavy and light infantry, with cavalry on the flanks, often massed on one side or the other. A small reserve of picked troops frequently appears. Bryennios protected his weak flank with Scythian skirmishers. Alexios placed his own Turkish skirmishers opposite these Scythians on his own weak flank. Neither Alexios nor Bryennios attempted anything other than a pitched battle; diversionary maneuvers (skirmishing, harassing) were not used. Each rebellion ended only after a field action that eliminated either the rebellious army or the rebellious leader. Rebels needed to fight to prove their legitimacy; in this case, Alexios fought because he needed to keep Bryennios away from Constantinople. The preference for pitched battles—whether deliberate or circumstantial—was to prove a problem when the Byzantines were faced with the Norman tactical system, which proved more effective in this kind of combat.

Normans

Anna's description of Norman recruitment and training is problematic, for she is more concerned with proving the recklessness of Guiscard's attack than in accurately representing the enemy army. Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt Anna's claim that the Norman army comprised thirty thousand infantry and cavalry, and one hundred and fifty ships.¹⁴ The Normans fought differently than did the other enemies of Byzantium. The Seljuks, the Pechenegs, and the Cumans fought fluid, feint-and-retreat battles. They sought to avoid close combat, where their lighter arms and armor would prove

¹³ *Alexiade*, I, 90.

¹⁴ *Alexiade*, I, 56.

a disadvantage. They had no goal beyond loot and escape. This meant they were a less dangerous foe than the highly organized Normans, who had territorial ambitions. The danger posed by the Normans also accounts for Alexios' disregard of the Seljuk threat. The east half of the empire was forgotten as the Byzantines fought to keep the Normans from advancing out of Epiros toward Constantinople.

The Normans constituted the most serious threat to the empire that Alexios faced during his thirty-seven year reign. His generalship reached its highest level by learning to handle their tactics and training. The Byzantine campaign of 1106-07 against Bohemond is the best example of the Byzantine army's strategy of indirect warfare during Alexios' reign. In previous campaigns Alexios had allowed his armies to face the Normans in frontal combat, with predictably disastrous results. In this campaign, by contrast, Alexios avoided battle with the Normans; instead, he slowly wore them down.¹⁵ This strategy was not born overnight. Certainly it does not seem to have been used during the emperor's first campaign against Robert Guiscard. A strategy of indirect warfare presupposes considerable experience and a high level of discipline among the ordinary soldiers. At Dyrrachion it also required a large fleet such as only the Venetians possessed. Indirect warfare also required a stable political situation in the capital, for it risked creating the impression of cowardice.

The Normans relied upon the shock of a massed cavalry attack to defeat an enemy army.¹⁶ Recent Byzantine experience had been battles against the Turks, Pechenegs, and against rebellious generals. When needed, Frankish mercenary units provided Byzantine armies with shock troops. Heavily armored Frankish cavalry was less useful than archers, *peltasts*, and skirmishing cavalry when fighting an enemy such as the Turks. Faced with a Norman army whose strength consisted of mounted warriors, protected by chain mail and mounted on specially bred horses, the Byzantine *kataphraktos* was virtually powerless.¹⁷ When the Byzantines chose to fight the Normans in open battle, cavalry against cavalry, the result was usually disastrous.

¹⁵ This strategy was not new, but it was new to Alexios. The *Strategikon* of Maurice, bk. 11, describes the proper way to deal with Franks and Lombards: to avoid battle, and instead wear them down by constant indecisive skirmishes. George T. Dennis, (ed.) *Das Strategikon Des Maurikios* (Vienna, 1981).

¹⁶ *Alexiade*, III, 114-115.

¹⁷ *Alexiade*, III, 114-115; II, 109. The first account describes typical Norman equipment: (chainmail, kite shield, helm, and lance), while the second describes the

The army that Alexios fielded in the first Norman campaign was the same force that both sides had used during the civil wars of 1071–81. The army of the rebel Bryennios (1077), comprised approximately twelve thousand men, half the Byzantine total. This meant that the army Alexios used against Robert Guiscard numbered between twenty thousand and twenty-five thousand men, including his Turkish allies. The list of troops enumerated by Anna Komnene includes the *exkoubitoi* a unit of the *scholae* that was under the command of Constantine Opos. There were also Macedonians, undoubtedly cavalry; these were under the command of Alexander Kabasilas. Tatikios commanded the Turks from Ochrid—Pechenegs—and Anna mentions 2,800 Manichaeans. The *vestiarii*, the household troops, were also present, as was the regiment of the Franks (*ton Frangikon tagmaton*), under Humbertopoulos.¹⁸ Lastly, the Varangians were at Dyrrachion, where they had a decisive role in the battle that ended Alexios' first campaign against Robert.¹⁹

Dyrrachion

Anna's account of the battle of Dyrrachion is muddled and filled with Homeric-style anecdotes about Alexios. Nevertheless, her account makes it clear that Alexios' strategy relied upon two conditions. First, Venice would have to control the Adriatic Sea. Second, Alexios' troops would have to defeat the Norman army after it had been weakened by an unsuccessful winter siege of Dyrrachion. Anna claims that a third of the Norman force died during the winter of 1107–08: ten thousand men and five hundred knights.²⁰ For Alexios' plan to succeed, Robert's army had to remain pinned at Dyrrachion. This was accomplished by the heroic efforts of the city's commander, George Palaiologos, who was supported by the Venetian fleet.

gift to Alexios of 150 special horses, along with 500 knights. This gift indicates that there was a difference between the Byzantine and western European horses. The equipment described above was called "Frankish," which presupposes that another form of armament was "Byzantine." Anna does not give us a correspondingly precise description of Byzantine cavalry armament, but she describes *kataphraktoi* in Volume I, page 90 and Volume II, page 27.

¹⁸ *Alexiade*, I, 151–52.

¹⁹ *Alexiade*, I, 158–59.

²⁰ *Alexiade*, I, 149.

The importance of Dyrrachion needs some explanation. Dyrrachion was the most important Norman base for further operations against Alexios. Robert began his campaign by taking Kerkyra, but the seizure of Dyrrachion would provide the shortest crossing of the Adriatic for men and supplies. Furthermore, Robert could hardly leave the city in enemy hands while a Venetian fleet prowled the Adriatic. The opportunity for the Byzantines and Venetians to land hostile troops at his rear, should the city remain in imperial hands, necessitated its capture.

Dyrrachion is Anna's best description of a campaign, and its precision (and plausibility) are exceptional among Byzantine battle accounts. Dyrrachion was fought in 1081, and Anna was born in 1083/4. We can only assume that Anna had access to some source of precise information. The accuracy of her information with respect to units involved and terrain covered bespeaks first-hand experience combined with a well-reasoned account. She begins with George Palaiologos' warning to Alexios that it would be foolhardy to risk a battle, even after the hardships suffered by Guiscard during the previous winter.²¹ Certainly she relies upon Palaiologos' memory, and it is safe to assume that whatever notes or reminiscences Nikephoros Bryennios used were also at her disposal.

What induced Alexios to fight? Several possibilities suggest themselves. First, the fall of Dyrrachion would have given Robert the advanced base he needed to continue his campaign, and would have offered his army a refuge in the event of defeat. Second, and more important, a Byzantine victory, together with Venetian control of the sea, would have destroyed Robert's army. George Palaiologos' advice was to skirmish the enemy to death and disrupt his foraging. This advice was discarded in favor of a plan supported by younger officers—a night attack—which never occurred. We cannot know whether partisans in Alexios' camp warned Robert, or whether his actions were coincidental. Before the Byzantines could put their subterfuge into action, Robert moved his forces out to the plain near Dyrrachion and formed up in battle order. Anna observes that Alexios had already dispatched a portion of the Varangians to attack the camp of Guiscard, and these were not present during the battle.²² The battle lines were as follows.

²¹ *Alexiade*, I, 155.

²² *Alexiade*, I, 158. George Palaiologos is an appealing figure—brave, resourceful,

Robert commanded the center of his army, which was divided into three parts. The left was under Bohemond's command; the right, along the sea, under Count Amiketas. Alexios drew up his army facing Robert, with his left flank against the sea. Alexios took the center; on the right was the *caesar* Nikephoros Melissenos, and on the left Pakourianos the Armenian, whose title at court was Grand Domestic (*Megas domestikos*). In front of the imperial line was a unit of "barbarians" with axes—Varangians—but it is unlikely that they were numerous enough to have a frontage as long as that of the whole Byzantine army. Guiscard also employed the "English" later in his campaign, and it may be that many of these men hired themselves out as mercenaries in the two decades following 1066, and were used by the Byzantine army to supplement the Varangian contingent. Anna remarks that they were armed with two-handed swords and shields, and she also notes that they grew weak under the weight of their arms and armor.²³ This suggests indicates that they were also wearing some form of heavy armor, perhaps chain mail. This armor was so heavy that it was worn only in the expectation of battle (as it was at the battle of Stamford Bridge, which ended with the slaughter of the largely unarmored force of Harold Hardrada). Archers were placed in between the main line of Alexios and the Varangians with instructions to skirmish with the enemy and retreat behind the shield wall when they were pressed.

Robert began the battle by detaching some cavalry to entice the Byzantines into an undisciplined charge. Anna mentions that a large force of *peltasts* was sent out to drive them off.²⁴ She is also quite specific about the difference between archers, *peltasts*, and *psiloi*, and it appears that Alexios retained a reserve of these men to deal with emergencies. Byzantine military manuals such as the *Strategikon* call these lightly armed men "assault troops."²⁵ These men were used

loyal, and as Anna admits in III, p. 175, an important source for all her accounts of the battles Alexios fought. Apparently he was not only, like Nikephoros Bryennios the *mesar*, an official of the court, but also Alexios' close friend. He appears in the battle with the Scythians and Cumans, as well as in an interesting incident where he becomes disgusted with Tancred's insolence toward the emperor, and chides him. (III, 17.)

²³ *Alexiade*, I, 158–160.

²⁴ *Alexiade*, I, 159.

²⁵ Dennis, *Strategikon*, 86, 1.26., 122, 1.21–24. George T. Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia, 1984), 15, 27. Alexios was seldom without such soldiers, who also appear at the siege of Constantinople, just before he took power.

for sudden operations to react quickly and nimbly to developing situations; hence the term "assault troops" for *peltasts* who carried little more than a few javelins and a shield.

To return to the battle of Dyrrachion, the Normans who faced the left flank of the Byzantine army comprised the infantry and cavalry under Amiketes. This division charged the Varangians and their leader Nampites, presumably still supported by archers and *peltasts*. The Normans were routed. As at Hastings, the English foot soldiers followed up their victory by advancing far beyond the main line of their army. Guiscard sent reserves against the Varangians, and the Varangians broke.²⁶ Anna falls prey at this point to her Homericizing tendencies, but it is clear that the breaking of the huscarles, like the breaking of the Immortals by Bryennios, was the signal for a general charge by the enemy. Guiscard's forces drove back the Byzantine line and routed the whole army in short order.²⁷ The imperial camp was overrun, the baggage train was captured, and the army was so dispersed that the emperor took flight for two days, only stopping once he reached Ochrid.

The magnitude of Alexios' defeat at Dyrrachion begs the question: could Alexios have conducted this battle differently? Alexios' peculiar tactic of deploying archers behind a shield wall of Varangians appears to be his first attempt to grapple with the power of the Norman cavalry charge. Whether the Varangians would have been better used in another role, or as a reserve, is a moot point. Behind them, the main battle line of cavalry gave way to the first charge of the enemy. The Normans probably appreciated the resisting power of Huscarle infantry against their charge, and perhaps Alexios was also counting upon a certain amount of Norman-English rivalry to give a greater incentive to his men.²⁸ To Anna's surprise, Norman infantry were successful in breaking and slaughtering the Varangians, whom Anna represents as highly undisciplined.²⁹ Despite Anna's

²⁶ *Alexiade*, I, 160.

²⁷ *Alexiade*, I, 160–163.

²⁸ The reason that Alexios had so many English recruits is a question which is not difficult to answer. Until 1072 the Normans were engaged in wars to secure their English possessions. In 1069–70 there were seven rebellions against Norman rule in England. After 1066 many Englishmen found service with Byzantine emperors.

²⁹ *Alexiade*, I, 160. Some of the huscarles escaped and fled to the sanctuary of St. Nicholas. The Normans burned the building and the men who sought refuge there.

remark that the Varangians advanced well beyond the Byzantine line, thereby inviting their defeat, it is just as likely that Anna is covering up her father's failure to exploit the Varangian victory over the Norman right wing. In this case, the defeat of the Varangians could be ascribed to Alexios' lack of support for them. Had they advanced too far beyond the imperial line, or had the imperial forces and their commander failed to support them properly? The latter seems the more plausible explanation. The Byzantines gained a great tactical advantage when the Norman right collapsed, but failed to exploit it. They lost the battle as a result and were forced into another twenty-five years of intermittent warfare with the Normans.

Alexios nonetheless deserves some credit, particularly for his quick use of *peltasts* to deal with the emergency on his left. The Byzantine main battle line's inability to withstand the Norman charge resulted in defeat. The use of Varangians, *peltasts* or other special troops was secondary to the battle's outcome, but only because the emperor failed to appreciate adequately what they had accomplished. The quick rout of the Byzantine cavalry, veterans of ten years of civil war and battle after battle against the Turks, is a strong indicator that Byzantine cavalry was more lightly armed and armored than its western foes. Reinforcing this supposition is Anna's remark that Alexios' horse was a "real" war-horse, obtained when Bryennios was defeated.³⁰ What did the rest of the Byzantine cavalry use as mounts, if only the emperor had such a horse?

The extent of the Byzantine defeat is most strongly indicated by the fact that Alexios was forced to call up recruits, who needed to be trained in horsemanship, archery, drills, and skirmishing.³¹ At this point, Alexios was lucky; his diplomacy with Henry IV of Germany paid off, and Robert was recalled to defend his Italian possessions, while Bohemond remained at Dyrrachion.³² Bohemond appears competent as a military commander, but he seems to have lacked his Guiscard's political clout, and he does not appear to have maintained control over his fractious noble subordinates. Bohemond's first campaign went well enough. He advanced southeast to Ioannina in Epiros, fortifying and garrisoning the city. When Alexios moved his newly recruited army there in the summer of 1108, the emperor

³⁰ *Alexiade*, I, 164.

³¹ *Alexiade*, II, 13-14.

³² *Alexiade*, II, 13-14.

remained outnumbered, and resorted to a stratagem in an attempt to disrupt the Norman cavalry charge, ordering the construction of wagons, which Anna calls chariots.³³ Like their ancient counterparts in the battles of Gaugamela (332 B.C.) and Magnesia (198 B.C.), they were ineffective. The Normans maneuvered around them by splitting their army into two groups and then simultaneously charged the Byzantine right and left flanks. Alexios' army was quickly put to rout. If indeed wagons were used as Anna indicates, their location in the center of Alexios' army would have had the added disadvantage of preventing troop movements by Alexios, which might have prevented the Norman encircling maneuver. The use of "chariots" was a stratagem that proved disastrous.

Alexios again retreated northward, to Ochrid, to gather mercenaries and muster his forces. Because George Palaiologos successfully defended Dyrrachion, these early battles, which Alexios lost, were fought in Epiros rather than further east. If Dyrrachion had fallen earlier, the Normans would have been able to throw their full military force at Macedonia and Thrace. Thessalonike would have been under siege, not Dyrrachion. If the Norman army had been encamped around Thessalonike, Alexios would have had difficulty raising an army with the Macedonian, Thracian, and Thessalian contingents that comprised much of his cavalry.

Alexios' next battle was fought near the Vardar River. He again sought some form of stratagem that would break the apparently irresistible Norman charge. The emperor planned to place a field of caltrops in front of his army. A force of lancers would be stationed in front of these devices to entice the enemy center forward into the caltrop field. When the enemy became enmeshed in the caltrops, the Byzantine *peltasts* would hammer them with missiles, while the Byzantine cavalry assaulted their flanks.³⁴ The Normans again anticipated Alexios' maneuver. They wheeled their cavalry around the field of caltrops and the stationary lancers, and smashed the Byzantine flanks. Bohemond's own center remained stationary, preventing Alexios' lancers from moving to the aid of their compatriots. When his flanks had retreated, Alexios was left only with the men in his

³³ *Alexiade*, II, 18-19. Anna provides little real information about this campaign. The movement of armies and individual events appear disjointed. This story is possibly an exaggeration, or it may be completely fabricated.

³⁴ *Alexiade*, II, 20.

center. He wisely elected to flee. According to Anna, the soldiers were afraid of the Normans (having twice met defeat at their hands) and performed poorly.³⁵ What this battle demonstrates is the uselessness of tricks and stratagems against a highly disciplined cavalry force, such as that commanded by Bohemond. It also demonstrates the superior tactical flexibility of the Normans, who always managed to improvise and maneuver, while the Byzantines were constantly forced to react defensively. This flexibility, combined with shock power, made the Norman army an extremely efficient offensive force.

To prepare for the next stage of the struggle against the Normans, Alexios requested aid from his Turkish allies and received seven thousand cavalry from Suleyman, the Seljuk sultan of Nicaea. He also collected other mercenaries, probably the "Sarmatians" mentioned in Anna's account of the ensuing battle.³⁶ On this occasion Alexios took advantage of the overconfidence that the Normans had built up during their recent victories over the Byzantine armies. In each of these previous battles, the Normans quickly dispersed the Byzantine cavalry and then pursued it for many miles. Alexios took advantage of this tendency and ordered his army to retreat at first contact with the Normans. When the Normans followed in pursuit, Alexios and some elite cavalry troopers would stage an ambush and sack the Latin camp. Alexios ordered his archers to fire at the enemy horses rather than at the riders. As a result of these measures, the Byzantines gained a partial victory while skirmishing with the Latin rear-guard. This victory was much needed, since the Byzantine cavalry were becoming well practiced in the art of escape.³⁷ After further skirmishing, the Normans retreated north and west to Kastoria, where Bohemond had difficulty paying his noble subordinates. Imperial forces soon took the city.

Alexios, through shrewd political maneuvering, (probably supplemented by liberal bribery of Bohemond's nobles), managed to restore the Byzantine-Norman border to its line at the beginning of the campaign (1083). Robert's second campaign was short-lived, and ended with his death in 1084. We will therefore move directly to

³⁵ *Alexiade*, II, 20.

³⁶ *Alexiade*, II, 30-31. These 'Sarmatians,' called *Sauromaton* by Anna Komnene, are either the Pechenegs or Cumans that Alexios used for these types of operations. They are probably Pechenegs that Alexios enlisted after their defeat in 1091.

³⁷ *Alexiade*, II, 27-30.

the campaign conducted by Bohemond in 1107-08. This campaign demonstrates the generalship of Alexios at its most experienced and energetic.

Anna Komnene describes Alexios' preparations for this campaign in detail. The emperor first called for a fleet from the Cyclades.³⁸ Army units were sent out under the best young leaders, and the passes around Dyrrachion were seized. This prevented the Normans from foraging properly once they had plundered the supplies from the area around the city.³⁹ Other soldiers were sent to interfere with Norman operations and to divert them from their attack on Dyrrachion. The Normans sought to engage the Byzantines in skirmishes, but the emperor ordered his men to avoid battle, and these Norman forays did not break the Byzantine cordon around their forces. Anna's description of Alexios' tactics is reminiscent of the sixth-century *Strategikon*: "A general's supreme task is to win, not merely by force of arms, but also by . . . treaties . . . some-times . . . an enemy can be beaten by fraud."⁴⁰ A chance engagement near Dyrrachion resulted in a Byzantine victory, and this seems to have limited the Norman's ability to leave camp in foraging groups to forage.⁴¹ The Byzantines appear to have had considerably less difficulty with these skirmishing forces and beat them back, burning Bohemond's fleet in the process.

Anna's account of Alexios' advice to his men preceding these actions, though subject to question, is more than usually detailed. Alexios' advice to his men demonstrates a sounder grasp of his army's tactical and strategic problems than he previously displayed. He ordered the mounted archers to skirmish with the enemy, harassing the Norman cavalry with archery-fire in the same way the Seljuks harassed Crusader forces. Lancers were stationed behind the screen of archers to take advantage of any disorder in the enemy line.⁴² The archers were ordered to shoot exclusively at the enemy's horses. No mention is made of the infantry during these skirmishes, only a highly mobile, flexible cavalry. Alexios' plan of campaign was a

³⁸ *Alexiade*, III, 65.

³⁹ *Alexiade*, III, 93.

⁴⁰ *Alexiade*, III, 101. (trans. E.R.A. Sewter, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene* [New York, 1987], 405).

⁴¹ *Alexiade*, III, 109.

⁴² *Alexiade*, III, 114.

masterpiece of indirect warfare. He blocked the Norman access to forage, prevented Bohemond from using the ocean to transport supplies, and harassed his exhausted troops with constant skirmishes. Alexios also sowed dissention within enemy ranks by offering bribes, and by planting false letters that seemed to implicate certain commanders. Disease and demoralization, combined with the Byzantine's aggressive defense, accomplished what three major defeats and five to six years of warfare had not been able to: Bohemond was forced into a humiliating treaty without the necessity of another pitched battle.

Pechenegs, Cumans, and Seljuks

Alexios' campaigns against the Pechenegs, Cumans, and Seljuks presented entirely different problems from his campaigns against either fellow-Byzantines or Normans, both of whom sought to fight decisive battles. In the case of a usurper, the danger to the Byzantine state was simply a change of ruler. The Norman threat was far more serious; a decisive defeat could have meant the end of the Byzantine Empire. The problem posed by a war against the Seljuks and the Turkic steppe peoples was that decisive victory was exceedingly difficult to secure because their armies were mobile and able to avoid combat with the heavily armed Byzantine contingents sent against them. The strategy that Alexios followed during his last campaign against Bohemond resembles the tactics that the Pechenegs and Cumans employed against him. His strategy was to attack and retreat, offer battle when expedient, flee and again skirmish as soon as the enemy had turned its back. This method of warfare can exhaust an opponent who wishes to bring his more agile foe to combat. Bohemond discovered this, and Alexios experienced similar difficulties in his two great campaigns against the trans-Danubian tribes.

Alexios learned that the only way he could counter the constant Turkish raids and invasions in the East was to fight fire with fire: to employ his own, well-trained skirmishers against those of his enemy.⁴³ In the European territories of the Byzantine Empire, the

⁴³ *Alexiade*, I, 136-137. Anna remarks that at first only soldiers committed were infantry skirmishers; they operated at night from galleys. Only after the coastline around the Bosphoros had been partially cleared of Turkish activity did these men

problem proved far greater: the armies of skirmishing Cumans and Pechenegs were so large that they threatened Byzantine control of Thrace and Bulgaria between 1081 and 1091, and intermittently thereafter. Anna describes the depredations of the Scythians during this period, and devotes almost the entirety of the *Alexiad's* Book 7 to an account of Alexios' skirmishes with these tribes. Anna makes them appear suddenly, as if attacks from beyond the Danube River were unknown before Alexios' reign. This is pure literary form, of course; Anna portrays routine events as exceptional and calamitous in order to cast Alexios' actions in a more glorious light.

We first hear of the Scythians in an account of their raid on the region near Adrianople in 1080.⁴⁴ Tatikios, who was frequently employed by Alexios on difficult missions, crossed from Kyzikos with some two hundred Franks, under the command of Humbertopoulos. He proceeded to Adrianople, where he drew recruits from the surrounding countryside.⁴⁵ The Scythians, laden with booty, were decisively defeated and withdrew north of the Danube. In spring of 1087, a Pecheneg army, which Anna estimates (implausibly) at eighty thousand, entered the empire and pushed south of the Haimos Mountains before a Byzantine army was able to stop them.⁴⁶ These two invasions demonstrate the weakness of Byzantium's northern border defenses, if any actually existed at this time. They attest as well to the dangers of being unable to maintain a standing army sufficient to meet sudden threats. The Franks, serving as Byzantine mercenaries, saw continuous service. But Alexios always drew his army from the surrounding countryside in Thrace and Macedonia. Soldiers could not be called up overnight, and the Pechenegs continued to raid while the imperial army was called up and organized. The local population suffered during the time it took the emperor to muster a force sufficient to drive off large raids.

The defeat of the Pecheneg horde and the death of its leader, Tzelgu, did not, however, remove the threat of the Pecheneg army,

receive horses, and begin to skirmish actively during the day. They were ordered not to engage in any major battles.

⁴⁴ 'Scythians' was a generic term that meant the tribes beyond the Danube, (Istros) river. Here it refers to the Pechenegs and Cumans in the same way that Kelt usually referred to Norman knights, but could also mean Frankish, Flemish, German, and English knights.

⁴⁵ *Alexiade*, II, 83.

⁴⁶ *Alexiade*, II, 87.

which was supplemented by what Anna terms Dacians (Hungarians), and Sarmatians (Cumans).⁴⁷ The Pechenegs retreated north, out of Thrace and Macedonia, but they remained in the Paristrion region, on the Byzantine side of the Danube, and held it completely. The former rebel Bryennios the elder, considered an expert on political and military questions, warned Alexios to expect defeat if he crossed the Haimos Mountains.⁴⁸ Alexios ignored this advice and advanced north to Drista, rejecting a Pecheneg embassy. His army contained the ubiquitous Frankish mercenaries, the levies Tatikios had called up, and the "Manichaeans", a force that Anna estimates numbered about three thousand men.⁴⁹ With this force, the emperor unsuccessfully attempted to seize Drista, and then turned south to Great Preslav, where the main Pecheneg army was encamped. Anna's description of this campaign provides interesting information about the tactical system of the Pechenegs, which holds true for the armies of all the steppe peoples the empire faced. She reports comments made by George Palaiologos and Gregory Maurokatakalon, both experienced military commanders, who said that the Scythians had no chance of victory if they fought the Byzantines exclusively with their cavalry and not with their "chariots."⁵⁰ The "chariots" that George and Gregory discuss were war wagons rather than the lighter chariots described in classical Greek and Roman sources. Pechenegs often placed these devices in a circle, as a fortified camp. When the battle turned against them, they would retreat to this enclosure and inflict heavy casualties upon any force that assaulted it. Indeed, this stratagem could not be defeated by a cavalry army alone, as attested by the experience of John II, who destroyed a Pecheneg army in 1122. He could not break their circle until he threw in the heavily armed infantry, his Varangian Guard, which was finally able to penetrate the wagon-lager and rout the Pechenegs.

In this battle, the Pechenegs placed their wagons in a fortified circle and drew up their cavalry in front. They attacked the Byzantine

⁴⁷ *Alexiade*, II, 87.

⁴⁸ *Alexiade*, II, 90.

⁴⁹ The Manichaeans were dualistic heretics, either Paulicians or Bogomils, both of whom were settled in Macedonia and Thrace, near Philippopolis. Since elsewhere Anna Komnene mentions the Paulicians by name, these were probably the Bogomils, who Alexios persecuted and attempted to destroy in the last several years of his reign.

⁵⁰ *Alexiade*, II, 95-96.

army after harassing it with skirmishers. Alexios positioned himself at the center of his battle-line with his relatives and companions, and with the Frankish mercenaries under Adrian. Caesar Nikephoros Melissenos commanded the army's left wing, whose composition Anna does not specify. Tatikios and Kastamonites led the right wing; they commanded the Byzantine troops and the allied contingents led by the Turks Ouzas and Karatzes. These allies would have been light cavalry, probably armed and accoutered like the Pechenegs they faced. It is even possible that they were Pechenegs or Cumans who were induced to fight for the emperor against their former compatriots and clansmen.⁵¹ It is reasonable to assume that the bulk of Alexios' army consisted of the same men Tatikios had recruited earlier: Thracians and Macedonians. The most interesting aspect of this battle is that Alexios linked his infantry and cavalry squadrons. This strategy was similar to the one that he had pursued against the Normans, in 1081, when he used his *peltasts* to deflect the Norman cavalry attack. We have no way of knowing whether the infantry squadrons that Anna describes were spearmen or *peltasts*. But because they are described as linked to cavalry squadrons, it is likely that they either possessed missile troops with which to support the cavalry, or heavy spearmen who could provide a base of support should the cavalry fail in their assaults. The description, moreover, implies that the infantry were working in cooperation with the cavalry along the length of the battle line. This contrasts with the usual Byzantine cavalry-infantry formation, which positioned cavalry on the flanks, and infantry in the center. It seems most likely that the infantry stationed with the cavalry were *peltasts*, since it is difficult to believe that disjointed units of less-agile heavy spearmen could have formed up quickly enough to provide a line behind which the cavalry could hide, while *peltasts* would have been useful in any kind of action against missile-armed cavalry. Alexios' plan demonstrates that he understood the need for a flexible battle-formation against the Pechenegs. With the army arranged in a checkerboard formation, the infantry could provide missile support, and perhaps a refuge for retreating cavalry; the cavalry provided mobility and assault power.⁵²

⁵¹ *Alexiade*, II, 97.

⁵² *Alexiade*, II, 97-98.

The battle that ensued was an equal, bloody fight until Pecheneg reinforcements of thirty-six thousand men (according to Anna's account) arrived late in the afternoon. This relief force routed the Byzantines. Although it is unlikely that either the emperor's army or the army of his opponents were as large as Anna claims, the account of this action indicates that the battle was a long, brutal affair. It reportedly lasted all afternoon—one of the longest battles that Anna describes. The emperor and his men scattered; Alexios next appears at Verroia, where he ransomed Byzantine soldiers who had been captured in this battle.⁵³

This battle presents historiographic problems, since it follows the course of the battle of Adrianople (478) so closely that we must question the veracity of Anna's account. There is no mention of linked infantry and cavalry squadrons at Adrianople. However, the account of the emperor's assault upon the Pecheneg force, their success as a consequence of a wagon-lager, and the arrival of a relief force that put the imperial army to rout closely mirrors Ammianus Marcellinus' account. Certainly a battle occurred, and Alexios was defeated; Anna would not have failed to mention a victory, and because soldiers or sons of soldiers involved could have verified the battle account, we can accept Anna's description of the end of the action; a Pecheneg relief force arrived and destroyed the Byzantine army. The audience would have probably recognized this as an allusion to earlier and greater events. This was useful to Anna as a literary device. The emperor was defeated, yet he would gain some amount of reflected glory from the allusive comparison of his deeds with those of Valens, an emperor from a time of greater imperial power.

As in so many times past, the empire benefited from the disunity of its enemies. The victorious Pechenegs, returning to their allies (the Cumans), refused to give them a share of the booty. The Cumans turned upon the exhausted Pechenegs and defeated them. Nevertheless, when the Pechenegs again moved south, Alexios offered them the terms they had demanded before these battles. The Pechenegs accepted Alexios' terms; this gave them an opportunity to rest and then continue raiding and pillaging; they almost immediately broke the treaty. At Adrianople, Alexios collected a second army. Tatikios had mustered his army at Philippopolis, but now the Pechenegs had

⁵³ *Alexiade*, II, 101.

crossed the Haimos Mountains, and were in Thrace proper, a province that until 1090 had been spared foreign invasion. Since Alexios' forces were insufficient to permit a direct confrontation, he practiced the same tactics of skirmish and retreat that he had used against the Turks on the Bosphoros, at Kyzikos in 1081. Unfortunately, this sniping was unable to prevent the Scythians from going where they wished and taking whatever booty they desired. They proceeded south along the Hebros River to Kypsella, where they established a winter camp. Alexios followed their maneuvers by first going to Bulgarophygon, from which he could intercept them if they moved either north towards their homes or east towards Constantinople.

While at Bulgarophygon, Alexios' army again took shape. Two thousand *archontopouloi* (sons of veterans), were mustered, and five hundred Flemish knights arrived to serve the emperor. The corps of Maniakes also arrived, and this induced Alexios to give battle.⁵⁴ The emperor marched his army to Rousion; there it fought a sharp skirmish in which Alexios dismounted his archers and used them to drive off the enemy's attack.⁵⁵ This Byzantine 'victory' nevertheless necessitated a retreat; because of this we should be careful to accept only the most obvious details from Anna Komnene's account. The emperor retreated to Tzouraulos, which he fortified and surrounded with a trench. Again, these were hardly the actions of a victorious and confident commander. Alexios won a second victory at Tzouraulos, by using the stratagem of wagons rolled down a slope into the advancing Pechenegs. Whether or not this was a real victory, Alexios again did not feel confident enough to pursue the enemy. The Pechenegs remained undestroyed, and a raiding party next appeared ten stades from Constantinople.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The *Archontopouloi* appear to have been a corps of cadets, trained and equipped by Alexios and his personal staff. These men may have been the sons of nobles, or of cavalry veterans. See also Mark Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army* (Philadelphia, 1992) 206. The corps of Maniakes, took its name from the Byzantine troops under the general George Maniakes, who had nearly conquered Sicily for Constantine IX (1040–42). These men were clearly (in 1090) not the same men who had fought in Sicily, or the veterans would have been at least seventy years old. In all probability, the corps was maintained as a separate unit after Maniakes' death. This appears surprising, since Maniakes died while engaged in rebellion. It is possible that the name of this corps referred to those imperial troops who were registered in the army of Maniakes, and to their replacements. If so, this offers a clue to the method of enlistment and maintenance of these lists.

⁵⁵ *Alexiade*, II, 122–123.

⁵⁶ *Alexiade*, II, 128.

After the events at Tzouraulos, the emperor disbanded his veterans to the "western cities," in order to protect them from the marauders. However, he was now forced to call them to service again. Anna's list of soldiers called up includes Vlachs, Bulgars, Frankish mercenaries, and presumably the *archontopouloi* and the Varangians as well.⁵⁷ With these men, Alexios proceeded southwest toward the main Pecheneg concentration at Aenos, on the coast of the Aegean Sea. Alexios was forced to reconnoiter the enemy by boat, an indication that Pechenegs controlled the countryside. With his army—five thousand Vlachs, an unspecified number of Bulgarians, five hundred knights from Flanders, the *archontopouloi*, and a reported "forty thousand" Cumans, he advanced against the Pechenegs, crossing the Haimos Mountains and setting up a fortified camp.

Anna Komnene carefully describes the battle of Lebounion (1091). Alexios stationed himself in the center of his army, which was divided into three parts. The army faced north, with George Palaiologos in command of the right, eastern wing, and Constantine Dalassenos in command of the left—presumably, the western wing. Anna regrettably does not provide further details about the placement of individual units, however she does make it clear that the Byzantine infantry was posted in the center, and the cavalry on the wings. We cannot be certain of Alexios' total numbers. Anna reports that the Byzantines' Cuman allies numbered forty thousand, but imperial forces could hardly have reached that number if Alexios was delighted by the arrival of five thousand 'highlanders,'—probably Vlach tribesmen.⁵⁸ The imperial and Cuman forces almost certainly outnumbered the Pechenegs; the two cavalry flanks of Alexios' army advanced faster than the infantry center, and the Pecheneg army was caught in the semi-circle thus created. This maneuver would have been very difficult to perform had the Pechenegs outnumbered the Byzantine-Cuman forces. Once the Pechenegs had been defeated, this partial envelopment would account for the slaughter that followed. It is noteworthy that Alexios used the local population to run water up to his front-line soldiers. This was a wise expedient, one

⁵⁷ The Vlachs (Βλάχοι) inhabited Thessaly and the northern Balkans. See ODB, 2183.

⁵⁸ *Alexiade*, II, 140, (8,5,1.10–13) Anna says that five thousand of these highlanders joined Alexios' army. These men were probably the Vlachs who appear as mercenaries in the armies of Alexios.

that was not practiced by the Pechenegs.⁵⁹ The Byzantines and Cumans inflicted a severe defeat on the Pechenegs, but they were not, as Anna claims, annihilated in 1091.⁶⁰ The Crusaders would later complain of Alexios' Pecheneg mercenaries, when they were ordered to follow the Crusaders and prevent their army from pillaging the countryside.⁶¹

Alexios' final campaign against the Cumans was caused by their support of an imposter who claimed to be a son of the deceased emperor Romanos IV. The Vlachs, always-unreliable allies, showed the Cumans unguarded passes, and again Alexios was forced to fight the enemy in Thrace itself. He mustered his army at Anchialos, where he could rely both on the natural defenses of the city and upon his fleet.⁶² The Cumans advanced, and Alexios drew up his ranks between the city and sea on the right, and the rough ground on the left. This was a clever strategy because as Anna says, the rough ground prevented any sort of cavalry maneuvers, while the sea obviously prevented any maneuvers on that flank. Therefore the Cumans could not use their greater numbers against the emperor, but would have to assault the imperial line, a form of warfare in which the Byzantines, together with their Frankish allies, were quite capable. In this instance the Cumans were defeated, although in view of their numbers, it is understandable that Alexios declined to allow his men to pursue them.

Alexios' last Cuman campaign demonstrates his increased skill as a general; he certainly controlled his men with a higher degree of proficiency than he had in his early campaigns against the usurper Bryennios. When confronted with a force of twelve thousand Cumans who occupied a ridge above him, he enticed them from their superior position by sending against them some Uze Turkish allies, armed with bows. These troops harassed the Cumans with archery fire.⁶³ When the Cumans could no longer withstand the casualties caused by this fire, they advanced from their hilltop position. This is what Alexios wanted them to do; it gave the advantage to the Byzantine

⁵⁹ *Alexiade*, II, 143.

⁶⁰ *Alexiade*, II, 143.

⁶¹ *Le 'Liber' de Raymond D'Aguilers*, ed. J.H. & L.L. Hill (Paris, 1969), 38. Raymond, d'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*. Tr. Hill, John Hugh & Laurita L. (Philadelphia, 1968), 18–19.

⁶² *Alexiade*, II, 194–95.

⁶³ *Alexiade*, II, 201–02.

heavy cavalry. These troops engaged the Cumans in hand-to-hand combat and broke them. Alexios finally destroyed the Cumans in another battle north and west of Adrianople, calling back his heavier troops once the enemy had been broken, and pursuing the Cuman force out of Byzantine territory with his lighter-armed cavalry.⁶⁴

The Seljuks

Alexios fought the last campaign of his reign in Anatolia, against the Seljuk Turks. Anna provides accounts of two of these battles. The first was a surprise attack against a small Turkish force; the second was a skilled fighting retreat from Seljuk territory when the main Seljuk army arrived.⁶⁵ This difficult campaign demonstrates that both Alexios' and his army's experience had increased. However, Byzantine difficulties with the Seljuks were not over, and the campaign of 1116-17 attests to the strengths and weaknesses of the army that Alexios developed between 1081 and 1117.

This last army of Alexios was composed of the regular Byzantine troops, supplemented by foreigners and mercenaries.⁶⁶ These forces took time to muster, leading one to suppose that Alexios was drawing not only upon his Thracian contingents, but also upon those in Macedonia and perhaps Thessaly. During the summer of 1116 Alexios took this army, minus the mercenaries, who had not yet arrived, and scouted southwestward from Nicaea. He defeated a small force of Turks at Poemanenon before returning to his base at Lopadion. The mercenaries arrived while the army was encamped. The most interesting aspect of this campaign is that, despite the Crusaders' success in restoring much territory to Byzantium, Turkish raiding forces still appeared near the Bosphoros.

While he was regrouping his army at Lopadion, Alexios received word that a large Turkish force was advancing upon the city of Nicaea, the largest Byzantine urban possession in the east. At this point in her narrative, Anna Komnene resorts to one of her most remarkable rationalizations. Alexios' political opponents in the cap-

⁶⁴ *Alexiade*, II, 204-05.

⁶⁵ *Alexiade*, III, 169-72.

⁶⁶ *Alexiade*, III, 187. Anna says that foreigners, mercenaries, and Alexios' own army were all called together for this expedition.

ital had criticized him for his inaction at Lopadion. Anna presents the following story: Alexios abandoned his attack upon the Sultan because his defense of western Asia had frightened the Turks so much that he was worried an overt move would cause them to flee back to Ikonion, thus depriving Alexios of the battle he sought.⁶⁷ Despite this rationalization, she reports, "there was much criticism and whispering against the Emperor, for after having made such preparations, and having gathered such a force against the barbarians, nothing great was accomplished, but he retired to Nicomedia."⁶⁸ Anna again seeks to justify a decidedly passive response: the greatest general is not always the one who fights; victory can be obtained in many ways. Anna's subtext is that Alexios' army was too small for battle against the Sultan's main army, so he retired to Nicomedia to recruit more men.⁶⁹

With this reinforced army Alexios advanced to Santabaris and then to Philomelion, which his army seized. Meanwhile, parties of scouts were sent out to recover prisoners that the Turks had taken. When these were recovered (and this was the only success of the campaign), Alexios marched back towards Nicomedia. He had heard that a large army of Turks was advancing against him from the north. The Turks made contact with the Byzantine army, which assumed a defensive formation; the Greek refugees from Turkish territory were in the center, with the Byzantine infantry in a square around them. Anna's account of this fighting retreat is one of the most interesting battle descriptions in the *Alexiad*.⁷⁰ This kind of discipline while under attack was very difficult to maintain, particularly in retreat. Nevertheless, Alexios' men did not break ranks.⁷¹ Usually we need to be wary of Anna's praise of Alexios, but in this case it appears warranted. After failing to defeat Alexios' army, the Seljuk sultan, Malik-Shah, made a treaty with the emperor. This failure prompted his brother, Mas'ud to rebel, and Malik-Shah was blinded

⁶⁷ *Alexiade*, III, 193.

⁶⁸ *Alexiade*, III, 194.

⁶⁹ *Alexiade*, III, 195.

⁷⁰ *Alexiade*, III, 204-05. It was during this retreat that Alexios unveiled his "new" battle formation, which appears to have been the simple expedient of forming his infantry into a square and marching back to imperial territory.

⁷¹ *Alexiade*, III, 203-06. Malik-Shah had by now arrived and led a major assault on the Byzantine rear-guard. Nikephoros Bryennios, Anna's husband, drove it off. The Byzantine light cavalry allies pursued the Turks.

and executed. The successful march to Philomelion and back is the most interesting campaign of Alexios' later years because it indicates how proficient the Byzantine army had become: the army maintained an exacting discipline on the march, which prevented the Seljuks from inflicting serious damage. This alone indicates the profound difference between the army that Alexios received from his predecessor, Nikephoros Botaneiates, and the army that he led against the Seljuks.

Conclusion

Although most of Alexios' campaigns were defensive, the primary difference between the Turkic campaigns (against the Pechenegs, Cumans and Seljuks) and those conducted against Byzantine usurpers, or the Normans, is that the Turkish peoples were interested in raiding and plunder. They were not tied to fixed locations and could choose to give or refuse battle as they wished. Unlike Robert Guiscard and Bohemond, or the rebel Bryennios, the Turks had no goal other than booty. Upon entering imperial territory they split up, coming together to fight, and avoiding battle whenever possible. They could be caught only when weighed down with captives and plunder. Tatikios attacked such a group near Philippopolis, but more often these raiding parties would make peace until the emperor disbanded his men. Since the Pechenegs were essentially always on campaign, they found it easy to take advantage of the peacetime dispersal of Byzantine troops, and the seasonal nature of imperial campaigning. Campaigns against the Pechenegs and Cumans were thus difficult because the emperor had to decide whether to disperse his men to prevent plundering, or to risk a pitched battle against an enemy that could easily flee in defeat and was tenacious in pursuit of a defeated foe. The Byzantine soldiers had more difficulty fleeing, and if they did, it was their own territory that would suffer. The Pechenegs and Cumans posed only an indirect threat to the Byzantine state. However, the wide range of their raids, their ability to concentrate and disperse, and their numerical superiority made them a great threat to Thrace, one of the few areas relatively safe from foreign invasion. Thrace and Eastern Macedonia were also two of the three major recruitment areas for Byzantine soldiers, and the Empire could hardly survive if it lost them.

Alexios' tactics against the Pechenegs, like those against the Normans, constitute evidence of an increasingly intelligent employment of combined arms. His use of archers to provoke an attack at Tzouroulos, and later against an isolated band of six thousand Pechenegs, and his pairing of infantry and cavalry squadrons in support of one another in the battle at Great Preslav, show a high degree of tactical sophistication, as well as a high level of discipline among his troops. His choice of terrain at Anchialos, forcing a numerically superior enemy to fight hand-to-hand, the Byzantines' preferred style, was masterful. Alexios had difficulty achieving complete victory against the Pechenegs and Cumans because they were an enemy whose quick horses made them difficult to pin down and destroy—even when beaten in battle. The exception to this rule was the battle of Lebounion, in which a horde of Cumans also participated, and in which the combined allied forces considerably outnumbered the Pechenegs. The Pechenegs were outflanked on either side and surrounded. In this type of battle, hand-to-hand and at close quarters, the Byzantines and the heavily armed Franks held a great advantage. The tenacity of Alexios' defense of Thrace and the abundant use of Byzantine gold to buy the services of Pecheneg survivors as mercenaries kept them from being a threat until the reign of his son, John II.

Alexios Komnenos' campaigns were consistently reactive. The attacks of the Normans, the Pechenegs, the usurpers, and the Turks of Ikonion forced the emperor into defensive wars, fought almost entirely within the empire, where failure threatened Alexios' political survival as well as the survival of the state. The usurpers that Alexios fought were recruited, armed, and trained from much the same population, as were his armies. Macedonia, Thrace, Thessaly, and Choma provided the men who fought for both the emperor and the usurpers. Furthermore, the tactical doctrine followed by each side was similar. What is most striking about Alexios' battle against Bryennios is the way the forces mirrored each other in their tactical disposition.

It is probably unfair to judge Alexios' military capabilities in these early campaigns. He did not have complete freedom of action, and the presence of political foes in the capital meant that every hesitation or sign of weakness could prove politically fatal. As a tactician, Alexios appears no worse than his opponents. But battles against armies armed and organized like his own provided no unexpected tactical challenges. If numbers were equal, the better-disciplined force

usually won. While we should discount Anna's descriptions of miraculous escapes and brilliant stratagems, there is something remarkable about an emperor who held power through so many defeats in battle and so many coup attempts. Thirty-seven years was a long time for any emperor to reign in even the best of times, let alone in times of nearly constant crisis. Despite these trials and difficulties, Alexios died in bed, attended by his wife and by his daughter, Anna.

Alexios had great difficulty adapting his army to the Normans' battle tactics. Accustomed to fighting pitched battles, Alexios at first fought the Normans directly, which no doubt pleased Robert Guiscard. After several defeats (Dyrrachion in 1081; Kastoria in 1083), it became clear to Alexios that the Byzantine *kataphraktos* was no match for the enemy in open battle. Whether it was the superiority of the enemy's horses, the weight of their armor and heavy lances, their aggressiveness and training, or a combination of these factors, the emperor's cavalry were never capable of beating the Normans in a straight fight. The weight and striking power of the Norman formation did not detract from its tactical flexibility. At Dyrrachion the emperor sent forward his Varangian guard. The Norman cavalry allowed the huscarles to tire, and then Guiscard threw his own heavy infantry at them. When the exhausted huscarles routed, the Norman cavalry drove the Byzantine cavalry from the field. In several cases the emperor attempted to use stratagems such as caltrops; the Normans maneuvered around them and crushed the Byzantine cavalry before it could react to their maneuver. Only after considerable experience, including his first war against the Pechenegs was Alexios able to practice indirect warfare against the Normans. In the 1108 campaign, he cut off their supplies by sea, blocked the passes around Dyrrachion, and harassed the Normans mercilessly. This strategy was successful; when the Byzantines eventually fought the tired, starved, disease-ridden Normans, they were victorious.

Alexios never developed an equivalent strategy against the steppe peoples; the limited resources of the eleventh- and early twelfth-century Byzantine Empire meant that any strategy was bound to be less than totally successful against them. With money and stable recruiting grounds, something like the mobile cavalry army of the late fourth-century Roman Empire might have solved Alexios' problems. But Alexios could call up his levies only during emergencies. The sole cavalry that remained constantly under arms were the versatile

Frankish mercenaries. The desperate financial condition of the Byzantine Empire prevented the creation of an army capable of dealing with both the Norman and Scythian threats. The emperor used men he could call up or hire on short notice, and while he achieved some remarkable successes with this force, an army constantly raised and disbanded was dependant upon the energy and skill of its commander. By the time of the Seljuk campaign Alexios' men were veterans. They were used to his style of leadership and to his tactics, and they operated in a disciplined and professional manner under the most adverse conditions.

It is to Alexios' credit that he knew how to delegate authority. When he found men he trusted, such as Tatikios, George Palaiologos, Ouzas, and even some others of uncertain loyalty but great skill (such as Humbertopoulos), he relied upon their leadership. Because of the constant presence of potential rivals and rebels in Constantinople, it was essential that the emperor be able to send out a commander sufficiently competent to handle his responsibilities, but sufficiently loyal to his emperor. Alexios' captains deserve a large part of the credit for his successes. They frequently recruited his armies, and they were often sent as advanced commanders to threatened regions. Without men such as George Palaiologos, Alexios' reign would likely have ended in disaster. The emperor's capable lieutenants deserve a share in Anna's abundant praise of Alexios.

It is uncertain how deliberately Alexios Komnenos planned the restoration of the Byzantine army. He spent most of his long reign fighting wars he had not provoked. Nonetheless, the Byzantine army did develop during his reign. Alexios found effective ways of dealing with both Norman and Scythian tactics, and, if he did not always have the resources to be victorious in battle, he never decisively lost an entire war. His use of cavalry and infantry in support of each other, his orders to his archers to shoot at enemy horses (rather than their riders), his pairing of *peltasts* with lancers against marauding Crusaders,⁷² all point to Alexios' awareness of the limitations and strengths of his army. Over time, discipline as well as flexibility increased, although the types of men (Frankish mercenaries, Byzantine

⁷² *Alexiade*, II, 223.

cavalry, spearmen, *pellasts*, archers, and Turkish cavalry mercenaries) remained constant. No great strides appear to have been made in siege-craft, but Anna is largely silent about this less glorious form of warfare.

As a tactician, Alexios at the peak of his abilities was flexible and resourceful, well aware of the capabilities and limitations of his men and their commanders. He had a penchant for tactical ruses and gimmicks that more often than not got him into difficulties, but he was also a sound tactician, who used terrain and the inclinations of his opponents to his best advantage. His campaigns demonstrate a clever single-mindedness more than any great genius of execution. Given the materials he had at hand, the best one could say of any general in his position was that he won his wars.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CAMPAIGNS OF JOHN II KOMNENOS (1118-43)

John II has been called the greatest of the Komnenian emperors.¹ Alexios was forced to fight defensive wars, and Manuel faced a complex military situation that usually placed him at a disadvantage. John, by contrast, planned and fought focused, aggressive campaigns. Our perceptions of this could be credited to source bias, since neither John Kinnamos nor Niketas Choniates were adults during John's reign, and therefore their accounts are informed not by their personal experience, but entirely by hearsay. Stories developed around John's successful campaigns, and these naturally influenced our chroniclers' presentation of events. However, there is more to John's reputation than mere mythologizing. John carefully selected his campaigns: his offensives focused on taking cities in Cilicia, northern Syria and northwestern Asia Minor. His Hungarian and Pecheneg wars were defensive and were the only wars he fought in Europe. John's campaigns therefore demonstrate a coherent military policy. The emperor sought to control the cities of Cilicia and northern Syria in order to control Antioch. His campaigns in Paphlagonia and Pontos were intended to contain the power of the Turkish Danishmendids, who in the early twelfth century constituted a greater military threat to the empire (or so it seemed) than the Seljuks.

There are anomalies within this simple presentation of John's campaigns. John initiated a war with the Venetians in 1126 by outlawing their presence within the empire. John's concentration of funds in large Byzantine land armies, to the detriment of his fleet, resulted in Byzantium's defeat in the war against Venice. Byzantine emperors seldom understood the potential of naval power used strategically, to accomplish goals independent of the land army. They usually saw naval power as a method of supplying distant armies.² John also

¹ George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), 37

² Niketas Choniates, *Niketae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. Van Dieten, CFHB, (Berlin, 1975), 17-18. John used his fleet to supply his army when he campaigned against

attempted to create an alliance with the Seljuk Sultan Mas'ud against the heir of the Danishmend emir. This was also a failure because neither the heirs of Danishmend nor the Sultan could gain by destroying the other. Both the Danishmendids and successive Seljuk governments understood that Byzantium constituted less of a threat in the presence of another Turkish state that could divert the emperor's attention at critical moments.

John's grand strategy comprised three goals: security on the eastern border, control of Antioch, and containment of the Danishmendids. Unlike the military activities of both his father and of his son, John's campaigns usually included sieges. Our sources indicate that John conducted approximately twenty-five sieges (an average of one siege per year between 1118 and 1143), including actions where a siege was begun or completed. Subordinate commanders, whose deeds are not recorded by our chroniclers, probably conducted many more actions of this type.

Siegecraft was an altogether exceptional strategy during the reigns of Alexios and Manuel. The most notable example was Alexios' siege of Nicaea, conducted by crusader contingents from France, Normandy, and Flanders, with the aid of some two thousand Byzantine *pellasts* and Byzantine siege engines.³ Manuel also conducted sieges on occasion: Zeugminon was stormed and sacked by the Byzantine army in 1165, and Kerkyra was taken after a siege in 1155.⁴ The most important siege Manuel planned was his 1176 attack upon Ikonion, but the cumbersome siege train that followed his army contributed to his army's defeat. These, however, are isolated examples. No other offensive sieges appear in Alexios' reign, and Manuel fortified more places than he attacked.

the Hungarians, and in 1142 in Cilicia. Manuel used it independently against the Venetians in 1171, quite successfully, and against the Egyptians at Damietta. The great difficulty for a pre-modern fleet was that a blockade was nearly impossible; Venetian pirates could operate at will, despite the presence of a strong Byzantine fleet. A terrible (and decidedly ill-advised) conclusion was drawn from the experience: that the fleet was useless in protecting the empire. The way the Normans transported armies to Epiros was forgotten, and the notion that a fleet could or would take an army to Constantinople was never considered.

³ Anne Comnène, *Alexiade*, ed. B. Leib. (Paris, 1937-76), III, 12-13.

⁴ For Zeugminon, see Choniates, *Historia*, 134-135; John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, John Kinnamos, tr. C. Brand (New York, 1976), 10. For Kerkyra, see Choniates, *Historia*, 82 ff.; Kinnamos, 96-101.

The Byzantine Empire possessed no more than a few, isolated outposts in Asia Minor until the arrival of the Crusaders. Cities occupied by Byzantine forces in their wake (1197-1100) created the first Byzantine frontier in Asia Minor since 1071. Before 1071 the frontier was aligned with the mountain chains at the eastern end of the Anatolian peninsula. When Turks permanently breached this frontier, individual cities, Greek and Norman autarchs, and Armenian lords defended local territories, but there was no coordinated defense against the invaders. Alexios was too busy with defensive wars against the Normans and Pechenegs to plan the defense of the Byzantine eastern frontier. The only major action in Asia Minor during his reign was his campaign of 1116-17. His large army ventured out of Byzantine territory, gathered Greeks who were under Turkish rule, and retreated to the safety of the frontier.

John's policy of conducting sieges was part of a deliberate strategy to construct a stable defensive frontier by retaining key cities such as Gangra and Neokaisareia, and fortresses in Cilicia. John planned to defeat his enemies not by destroying their armies, but by occupying strategic fortified cities and controlling the surrounding territory. John fought battles when the tactical situation required that he destroy enemy contingents before attempting to take their cities. Examples of this occur at Aleppo, Kastamon, Shaizar, and at Neokaisareia.⁵ Choniates and Kinnamos never indicate that this was a deliberate policy of the emperor, but they are generally silent about emperors' grand strategies. For Basileus John, fortifications and cities just north of Anatolia's central plateau provided bases against the Danishmendids. John's control of Cilicia effectively cut Seljuk communication with the larger Seljuk sultanate further east. Byzantine control of Cilicia also provided outposts for military action against the Seljuks and against John's enemies in Syria. We should also not underestimate the importance of Cilicia as a base against Antioch. Alexios, John, and Manuel all attempted to control this city. Alexios had to fight to preserve the empire's core territory around the Aegean littoral; John realized that offensive gains were more precariously gained when obtained through large field battles. John understood that control of Cilicia or Paphlagonia was dependent upon control of key cities. Whether Manuel's policy of not engaging in aggressive

⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 20, 28-30, 34-36; Kinnamos, 19-20, 13, 21.

siegecraft was a deliberate one is open to debate; it may be that the complexity of politics in the empire prevented him from focusing military resources upon sieges, as had his father. John's campaigns, however, were conducted with the aim of capturing cities, and we should remember this as we examine individual tactical actions from his reign.

Before we begin our examination of John's tactics, we should evaluate whether John's strategy of siege-craft improved the empire's military and economic power. First, were substantial numbers of new cities held, and did these cities add to the empire's economic and military position—its ability to protect its territory while interfering in the security of surrounding states? This is relatively easy to judge by examining the sources for incidences of enemy incursions as well as the effectiveness of the emperor's countermeasures. Economic position is more difficult to quantify, in part because of the scarcity of tax registers, cadastral surveys, or even gross receipts from port duties of large cities during this period. This difficulty is pronounced with the Cilician and Paphlagonian cities John attacked. They remained on the edge of Byzantine controlled territory, and our chroniclers knew little about them. Furthermore, these cities remained in intermittent Byzantine control. Thus the current state of research on these cities does not permit us to determine whether they contributed anything to the Byzantine economy. As military commodities, they were theoretically valuable, but we have little evidence that they were used in this capacity. John used Cilicia as a base for his Syrian campaigns. Yet without the emperor's presence, Cilicia repeatedly regained its independence. John's campaign to hold the cities of Paphlagonia and Cilicia was a failure in an offensive, strategic sense. John took many cities, but few were held for any significant period of time, and they were apparently not used as bases against the Seljuks and Danishmendids.

These cities, however, were important not only as strongholds for military incursions by the Byzantine army. Like Manuel's campaigns in Italy, John's campaigns in Cilicia and Paphlagonia forced his enemies to fight defensively rather than invade imperial territory. When John took cities, his enemies had to expend resources to retake them, rather than to attack the empire. This strategy improved Byzantine security in Asia Minor, although it required constant vigilance and campaigning, which became impossible when Byzantium's relations with other states became more complex, and when the

Byzantine emperors of the Angelos dynasty (1185-1204) proved incompetent.

Sozopolis

The first example of tactical combat from John's reign occurs during the campaign of 1120. The purpose of this campaign was to conquer Sozopolis, a city in Pamphylia. It was the earliest attempt by John to open up a route of communication and supply to the east. The attack upon Sozopolis was a siege; it was quickly concluded, despite Kinnamos' comment that the city was so well situated that it was impossible to besiege with siege-engines.⁶ John instructed Paktarios, a cavalry commander, to fire arrows at the enemy troops who occupied the gates. When the Turks sallied out in frustration, Paktarios was supposed to feign flight until the emperor's main force ambushed them. This was a difficult maneuver, one that involved careful timing. It was common for feigned flight to become a real rout as soldiers became disorganized and disconcerted by the troops pursuing them. Alexios employed this maneuver outside of Larissa against Bohemond's Normans, with mixed results. At Sozopolis, it was highly successful. The pursuing Turkish force was surrounded, the Byzantine soldiers were able to press through the gates, and the city was taken.

Three components of this incident are significant. First, John inherited troops with a high degree of discipline, capable of performing potentially dangerous maneuvers that required considerable timing. Second, although Kinnamos calls the Byzantine cavalry group commanded by Paktarios and Deknos *doryphoroi*, (spear- or lance-bearers), their activities indicate they were also armed with bows.⁷ They were thus capable of both archery fire and of fighting hand-to-hand with Turkish cavalry. Third, feigned flight followed by an ambush is precisely the type of maneuver for which the Turks were famous. Here we see all of the elements of a mature, well-trained army: tactical combat discipline, careful coordination between units, and skill with both lance and bow. John's actions, moreover, are those of an

⁶ Kinnamos comments that Sozopolis was taken effortlessly, despite being impossible to besiege with engines: Kinnamos, 6-7. See also Choniates, *Historia*, 13.

⁷ Kinnamos, 6.

experienced general. He successfully commanded his officers in a complex military action, at the very beginning of his reign.

Pechenegs and Hungarians

In 1122, the Pechenegs crossed the Danube. This tribe had been quiescent since 1091, when Alexios defeated their army at Levunion. The survivors of that struggle enlisted in the Byzantine army, and harassed the Crusaders on their journey across the Balkans. John brought this new band of Pechenegs to battle near Verroia, in present-day Bulgaria. Like Alexios, John wanted to prevent the Pechenegs from entering the rich lands of Thrace and Macedonia. Kinnamos remarks that the Byzantines were victorious.⁸ Choniates states that the Pecheneg cavalry charged and fired missiles constantly. The Byzantines forced the enemy back to their wagon circle, but were not able to penetrate this fortified enclosure. It withstood several assaults. John's personal intervention at the head of his Varangians (whom Kinnamos calls *Britons*) broke the wagon lager of the Pechenegs and caused their defeat.

This incident is interesting for two reasons. First, Alexios never again made use of the Varangian guard after the slaughter at Dyrrachion in 1081. They served as palace troops when John seized the throne upon Alexios' final illness, but their reappearance in battle in 1122 indicates that they had been reconstituted as a combat-worthy corps. Secondly, this battle indicates that Pecheneg tactics had not changed since Alexios faced them in the 1090s. They still fought in waves of mounted archers, relying upon a circle of wagons to provide defense. John was forced to use his best infantry, the Varangian guards, to break their circle.

In 1127–28 John fought a brief war against the Hungarians, a campaign that was strategically defensive. The Hungarians sacked Branicevo and Sardica, and John responded by attacking them with his army and fleet in the spring of 1128. While his army traveled overland, his fleet sailed up the Danube River. The fleet ferried John's army across the river, and he defeated the Hungarian forces on the far shore.⁹ A river crossing in the face of a determined foe

⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 13–16. Kinnamos, 8.

⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 17.

is one of the most difficult of all military operations. John's forces must have been well disciplined and well protected by archers and missile-machines on the imperial ships. Kinnamos reports that the emperor sent an allied detachment of Ligurian knights and Turks upriver, where they crossed the Danube. This distraction enabled the emperor's army to join with the allied contingent. This combined army defeated the Hungarians. The Byzantine army remained north of Zeugminon into the next year 1129, when peace was made. The Hungarians did not disturb the Byzantine Empire for the rest of John's reign. Thereafter—from 1128 until his death in 1143—John's campaigns focused on the eastern territories: Cilicia and Paphlagonia.

The Cilician Wars

In the decade following Manzikert (1071–81), the Armenian princes of Cilicia became virtually independent of imperial control. Simultaneously, Byzantine officials (Theodore Gabras and Philaretos Brachamios) in Trebizond and Antioch became de facto independent rulers of these cities and regions. The First Crusade complicated an already muddled political and military situation. The independence of Cilicia under Armenian rulers did not become a problem for the empire until Leo Roupenid, the most powerful of the Armenian despots, obtained control of most of Cilicia and began to expand his power south, threatening the Byzantine-controlled cities along the coast of eastern Anatolia. Choniates reports that Leo wanted to seize Seleukeia, the most important Byzantine port in southern Asia Minor. John decided to bring Cilicia and Lycia under his control, and advanced south at the head of a large army through Asia Minor to Cilicia. First John seized Adana and Tarsus. Baka, a fortified city situated on a precipice, and Anazarbos, likewise fortified, resisted his efforts. As at Sozopolis, John sent lightly armed mounted archers—this time Turks—against the walls of Anazarbos. Meanwhile, siege engines threw stones against the walls.¹⁰ Choniates describes how John surrounded his engines with ramparts made of clay bricks, much as present-day tanks seek defilade positions from which to fire. The “flaming iron pellets” that the defenders had used to

¹⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 25–26. Kinnamos, 17–18.

burn previous engines were useless against these defenses.¹¹ The emperor's engines shattered the city's walls. This is one of the few instances in medieval military history in which a decisive victory was rapidly produced by siege engines.

This campaign should be considered together with the emperor's journey to Syria, which followed it. After attacking Cilicia, the emperor traveled southeast and entered Antioch as an ally and overlord of Prince Raymond, the Crusader ruler of Antioch. His campaign in Syria had the effect of strengthening the hold of Prince Raymond and the count of Edessa, Joscelyn II of Courtenay on these territories. It did not, however, directly strengthen the Byzantine position. Why would the emperor strengthen cities historians have assumed he wished to possess outright? The sultan of Ikonion, Mas'ud, attacked Byzantine cities nearer Constantinople while the emperor was far from the Byzantine core territories. Byzantine control of Cilicia offered many opportunities to influence Antioch. If the emperor remained unable to conquer Antioch, or to do more than intimidate the Syrian Turkish principalities, strong Crusader states strengthened John against his own Turkish enemies. Likewise, Mas'ud realized that Byzantine control of Antioch would leave the emperor better prepared to act against him. It was in his interest to do just enough militarily to distract John from his purpose in Syria. John remained undistracted; his Syrian campaign lasted three years (1137-1139.)

Even though John's Syrian campaign was primarily an exercise in siege craft, we can still learn something about the emperor's field tactics. Choniates offers tactical information about the siege of Pisa, a city near the Euphrates. According to Choniates, the Byzantine vanguard was initially defeated. The city's defenders pursued it until the emperor arrived with additional troops, described as "the men of his personal phalanx."¹² The Byzantine use of the Greek word *phalanx* can mean a close formation of either infantry or cavalry, so we cannot determine whether these troops were John's Varangian guard, or a cavalry guard. It is noteworthy that the Byzantine vanguard operated separately from the main army. When John retreated from Hungary in 1128, the Hungarians concentrated their attentions

¹¹ Nikephoros Basilakios, *Nicephori Basilacae, Orationes et Epistolae*, ed. A. Garzya (Leipzig, 1984), 61, ll. 25 ff.

¹² Choniates, *Historia*, 27-28. Kinnamos, 19, offers few details on the siege.

on the Byzantine rear-guard, suggesting that in both cases the vanguard and the rear-guard operated separately from the rest of the army.¹³ This implies that the army of John II had a standard order of march, with a vanguard, a main body, and a rear-guard. When the vanguard approached a city, it attempted to seize it swiftly, before the defenders could react. These independent actions imply considerable tactical initiative by these sub-commanders; battle was frequently begun before the emperor was present. These facts support the contention that the army of John Komnenos was well trained and professional, with an officer corps that was encouraged to take independent action.

Another event that sheds light upon John's military organization was the parade outside the city of Shaizar in 1138. This was organized to strike fear into the defenders of Shaizar.¹⁴ John divided his army into Macedonian, Keltic, and Pecheneg divisions. The Varangians were doubtless present, since John took them on other campaigns against mounted foes. According to Choniates, each of these units was armed differently: each unit carried its own equipment, according to its national custom.¹⁵ The most interesting aspect of this remark is that it implies that these units were usually not tactically arranged by race. The fact that Choniates remarks on it suggests that he considered this kind of organization unusual.

John's 1139 campaign in Paphlagonia also provides significant information about his organization and tactics. The goal of this campaign was to bring to heel the rebellious Constantine Gabras, ruler of Trebizond, to restore order to the *theme* of Armeniakon, and to provide a bulwark against Danishmendid expansion. John brought a large army of cavalry and infantry, which he marched along the Paphlagonian coastline in order to avoid Turkish ambushes.¹⁶ When the Byzantine army moved inland, the Turks attacked. Most of the Byzantine warhorses perished, and the Turks relentlessly harassed his army with hit-and-run attacks. When the emperor was able to fight an open battle with the Turks, the Byzantine cavalry was driven

¹³ Kinnamos, 13.

¹⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 29-30. Choniates reports that these men were arranged by race so that they could provide aid to each other, a cryptic remark that has no military significance. Choniates' observation that each of these divisions had a distinct kind of weaponry is more interesting.

¹⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 29-30.

¹⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 34.

back. Reorganizing his army in its camp, John used a ruse to give the illusion that his numbers were greater than they were, gathering all the infantry standards and giving them to the cavalry. He assigned the best horses to his best riders, described as both Latins (Franks) and Byzantines skilled with the lance. The Byzantines returned to the attack and proved victorious.¹⁷

Cavalry remained the striking arm of the army, despite the rough terrain of Cappadocia, which would normally suggest the use of infantry. The cavalry arm was initially defeated and driven back; presumably they took refuge with the infantry, which possessed a multitude (*pleistous*) of standards. If the defeated cavalry could use a multitude of infantry standards to give the appearance of great numbers, the emperor must have brought a large infantry force with him. Furthermore, the fact that John ordered the best (*eugene*, literally, well-born) horses to be gathered together and used as a unit reflects the qualitative differences possible within the simple designation 'warhorse.' The cavalry again are the decisive arm in battle, but this account also indicates the critical importance of good infantry. The foot-soldiers, whether in battle-line or protecting the camp, provided a refuge within which the emperor reorganized his defeated force. John's army was composed of Frankish and Byzantine cavalry of varying qualities, which fought in front of the infantry, together with another group of infantry that provided camp guards and the main supporting force.

What conclusions can be drawn from an examination of John's tactics? First, the sources limit the information we have available. Kinnamos provides details of the military events he chooses to describe, but these are sparse and virtually cease in the mid-1130s. From 1130 on, he lists John's military contests but does not describe them in detail. Choniates describes events throughout John's reign, but he is seldom interested in tactical maneuver. Of course, neither Choniates nor Kinnamos was particularly interested in battles; they place greater emphasis on court intrigue and the events of John's reign. Neither chronicler had experience as a soldier. Unlike Anna Komnene, neither claimed to rely upon soldiers' accounts. For those reasons, we cannot rely upon their judgment concerning the importance of particular military occurrences, and we should question their selection of

¹⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 34.

events, which tend to focus on imperial campaigning. As we read their accounts, we should wonder how many other campaigns were led by subordinate officers and ignored by our sources. These actions occasionally appear because of their importance, for example the Battle of Semlin in 1167, when Kontostephanos led the Byzantine army, or the 1177 campaign against the Turks invading the Maiander valley, which was led by John Vatatzes. The day-to-day fighting that comprised most frontier warfare is notably absent. It did not fit into the pattern of "imperial" events and personalities that forms the thematic basis for both Choniates' and Kinnamos' chronicles.

What can be said about John's army? He inherited a highly professional army, capable of turning defeat into victory, as at Neokaisareia, or at least enabling the army to conduct a fighting retreat. What is most striking about John's army is its ability to conduct this difficult maneuver. The army proved its flexibility in action in Pontos (1139), Cappadocia (1136-39, 1142), Syria (1137), and in Paphlagonia (1130, 1135). The army marched divided into a vanguard, a main body and a rear guard. Thus organized, it fought its way out of ambushes, conducted battles, sieges, and pursuits; it seldom succumbed to undisciplined pursuit of a broken enemy and was never seriously damaged while conducting a fighting retreat. The regions in which John campaigned—the mountains of Armenia, the plains of Syria, the valleys of west Asia Minor—each had their dangers for the Byzantine army. Romanos III had found the deserts of Syria to be too much for the veterans who had fought under Basil II.¹⁸ In Cappadocia and Armenia, Romanos IV, an experienced general, had been unable to supply and control the separate units of his army. In western Asia Minor, the Crusaders found themselves continually harassed and in want of supplies. When attacked, they fought; otherwise, they merely attempted to survive.¹⁹ John's army, on the other hand, moves about Asia Minor and fights in any kind of terrain. Instances such as Kinte,

¹⁸ Michel Psellos, *Chronographie*, ed. É. Renault (Paris, 1967), 36-37.

¹⁹ Rosalind Hill, ed. *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum: The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, (London, 1962), 23. "We therefore pursued them through a land which was deserted, waterless, and uninhabitable, from which we barely emerged or escaped alive, for we suffered greatly from hunger and thirst, and found nothing at all to eat except prickly plants which we gathered and rubbed between our hands. . . . [W]e lost most of our horses."

where the army was ill supplied and the horses died, are altogether exceptional. To be sure, we are now discussing the intersection of tactics and strategy. For the army to be well supplied required the creation of adequate military bases. It also required adequate requisitioning while on campaign outside imperial territory. While it is difficult to evaluate John's personal capabilities as specifically as we can those of Alexios or Manuel, it is clear from our sources that he was a master of the siege and that he was comfortable fighting in mountainous terrain. He also won victories in open battle, on the plains of Syria near Shaizar.²⁰ He never displayed the sort of paralysis that gripped Manuel at Myriokephalon, although the lack of detail in our sources would probably prevent any such description.

Despite our sources' very positive portrayal of John's military career, our assessment of him as a general must begin with the fact that he appears fully trained at the beginning of his reign. Kinnamos and Choniates do not demonstrate that his tactics developed, and the same is true of their presentation of his enemies. When John fought the Hungarians, when he campaigned in Syria, and when he was able to trick the Turks into open battle, the Byzantine lancer and his Latin allies usually proved superior. In the mountains, the emperor made use of both cavalry and infantry, and siege engines usually accompanied his forces, regardless of the terrain they had to be dragged through. John liked to build fortresses and to take them. This is particularly evident in his eastern campaigns.²¹

With respect to the physical constraints of tactics (the weapons, unit types, and maneuvers), our ability to analyze is again limited by a lack of source detail. Nevertheless we can form some conclusions. First, the Varangians were present and capable in specialized situations, much as were European sappers or pioneers in later periods. They were armed with long shields and axes. Byzantine lancers were drawn from Macedonia and Thrace and constituted major divisions of John's army. Latins provided a second division of the

²⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 29-31; Kinnamos, 19-20.

²¹ A short list of the places John besieged or fortified would include: Laodikeia (fortified), Sozopolis (besieged), Hierakokoryphitis (besieged), Zeugminon (besieged), Kastamon (besieged), Rhyndakos (fortified), Gangra & Kastamon (besieged), Adana & Tarsus (besieged), Anazarbos (besieged), Piza (besieged), Halep and Ferep (besieged), Kafartab (besieged), Shaizar (besieged), Neokaisareia (besieged), Lopadion and Attalcia (fortified), Pousgouse (besieged.)

cavalry; they were heavily armed, like the Norman and Flemish mercenaries who had served emperors since the 1060s. The Turkish division would have included Pechenegs, Cumans, and Asiatic Turks. These were cavalry, and carried lighter *melée* weapons. We cannot be certain whether they carried with them the light spears of the Syrian Turks, or possessed other *melée* weapons. They always carried bows. Choniates implies that the Byzantines and Normans, as well as the Turks, were armed differently, since against the army of Shaizar each division "appeared before them with their different arms."²² In several places Pecheneg "recruits," or the Turkish "division," are mentioned.²³ The "Macedonian Legion" also appears, as well as "newly levied troops."²⁴ Serbians, "Triballoi," are also listed as having been part of the Byzantine army.²⁵ We are fortunate in knowing that the Latins, Pechenegs, and Macedonians were cavalry. The geographical origin of the infantry is a more difficult question. As a defensive force even in tactical operations, they do not appear to have determined the course of battles and are therefore less frequently mentioned. Nevertheless, we should remember the assault of the Varangians on the Pecheneg wagon circle in 1122. And we should remember they were important enough to be mentioned when John's army was in trouble, at Neokaisareia, and this perhaps characterizes their role in most campaigns. They provided protection, support, and a refuge of last resort for the cavalry.

How was each group within the Byzantine army used? Our sources present the Pechenegs as skirmishers, while the Latins and Byzantines provide John with shock troops. Other infantry, in considerable numbers, supplemented the Varangians, if we are to judge by Alexios' 1116 campaign against Ikonion.²⁶ These troops were certainly always

²² Choniates, *Historia*, 29-30.

²³ Choniates, *Historia*, 25. "The emperor sent ahead a portion of his troops who were enrolled among his Turkish divisions." H. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, 1984), 15; Choniates, *Historia*, 29. "[John] gave her over to be looted by the soldiers, especially the recruited Patzinak troops who had taken her . . ." Transl., Magoulias, 17.

²⁴ For the "Macedonian legion," see Choniates, *Historia*, 23.

²⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 16.

²⁶ *Alexiade*, III, 199 ff. Anna's description of an outer ring of units, not connected to one another, and an inner force that would respond to threats, is not so revolutionary as she makes it sound. The outer force was undoubtedly infantry, while the reaction force was probably the cavalry troops, surrounding the baggage. This

present in John's army. Many of John's campaigns began or ended with sieges, where infantry support troops transported and protected the engines of war. Furthermore, since these campaigns frequently involved sieges, the baggage train that the army carried with it must also have been extensive. The largely invisible infantry accomplished all of this work. So whether we assume the continued existence of Immortals, *archontopouloi*, or others, it is clear that there were substantial numbers of infantry of all types in John's forces.²⁷

John Komnenos was an incessant campaigner. Like his father, he ruled from the saddle, and he died while on campaign. He passed on to his son, Manuel I, a seasoned army, one that had experience fighting Hungarians, Pechenegs, Seljuks, the Turks of Syria, and the Danishmendids. He brought his son on campaign with him, and this undoubtedly accounted for Manuel's military expertise, as well as his personal courage; the emperor had to restrain his son from risking himself in combat. John's campaigns usually ended with sieges, and it was his deliberate strategy to obtain fortified points that would enable him (in the east) to threaten his most important foes, the Danishmendids. In the west, he campaigned defensively. John's strategy was one of gradual gain—he fought the Danishmendids to a standstill with his aggressive campaigns in northern Asia Minor, while his campaigns in Cilicia temporarily gained that province for the empire. John seldom fought large, open battles, and when he did (against the Hungarians and the Pechenegs), it was to defend the empire's core territories, rather than to attempt to gain new territory. In contrast, Manuel would engage in several aggressive pitched battles. John was more comfortable conducting sieges, and this careful, rational strategy may not have offered the empire the opportunity for large territorial gains, but it also protected it from sudden

method of travel, with the infantry phalanx divided into units, with arms facing outward, is well chronicled. See George T. Dennis, (ed.) *Das Strategikon Des Maurikios*, (Vienna, 1981), 466–67.

²⁷ Hans-Joachim Kuhn, *Die byzantinische Armee im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Organisation der Tagmata* (Vienna, 1991), 250 for the *archontopouloi*, 243–46 for the immortals (*athanatoi*). Kuhn provides the best description of the development of these two units, tracing their origins to the reign of Alexios I and John I, respectively. In the case of the *athanatoi*, this unit disappears from our sources until it is mentioned in the reign of Michael VII (1071–78), when alternative sources for the *tagmatic* troops were sought, following the widespread dislocation that made Asia Minor useless for purposes of recruitment.

losses such as those that followed the battle of Manzikert. John's military policy protected the empire while gradually extending its control in the strategic regions of Paphlagonia, Pontus, and Cilicia. This was a much more reasonable policy than the one Manuel would pursue.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CAMPAIGNS OF MANUEL I KOMNENOS (1143-80)

Unlike the wars of John II, the campaigns of Manuel I Komnenos do not fall into easily distinguishable chronological categories. Manuel's reign began with an abortive invasion of the Seljuk sultanate of Ikonion and was immediately followed by skirmishes between Byzantine troops and the French and German crusaders who passed through the empire's Balkan territories during the Second Crusade. Manuel battled the Normans over Kerkyra and then staged a counter-invasion of Norman territory in Italy, seizing much of Apulia. Simultaneously, Manuel fought Stephen III of Hungary and engaged in several unsuccessful raids of Serbia. Cilicia rebelled, and Manuel's cousin Andronikos Komnenos was unable to regain the territory for the empire. Manuel briefly visited Antioch in 1159, but a year later he was again in Europe, where he fought the Hungarians. Subsequently (in 1162-63) he reorganized the Phrygian cities; the war with Hungary continued until 1167. In 1168, Manuel again invaded Serbia, while a Byzantine fleet attacked Damietta, an important port in Fatamid Egypt, in conjunction with Latin forces from the kingdom of Jerusalem. In 1171, Manuel exiled the Venetian resident merchants and seized their property (the worst policy decision of the Komnenian period). At the end of his reign Manuel refortified several cities on the edge of the central plain of Anatolia and launched an unsuccessful campaign against the Seljuks of Ikonion. Intermittent skirmishing in western Asia Minor continued until Manuel's death in 1180.

There appears to be no deliberate, strategic pattern to Manuel's campaigns; was there at least a policy that ties them together, notionally if not chronologically? The argument can be made that there was a coherent policy, or at least an attempt at one.¹ First, Byzantine territorial losses in the east made it imperative to find new wealth in the west for the landed families. This led the Komnenian

emperors to divert most of their wealth and military power toward their European territories. Manuel's policy in Asia Minor was to regroup and fight defensively. His most substantial achievement was to reduce Hungary and Antioch to vassalage. Manuel's ability to apply pressure upon these states through Byzantium's superior military power meant the partial extension of Byzantine policy to these states. Money sent to the west, including payments to western soldiers from *pronoia* (land holdings) was a response to the growing power of the western peoples. Finally, following Choniates, it has been assumed that Manuel's army was heavily composed of foreign troops.²

Several of these assertions are outside the scope of our study of Manuel's campaigns. On the other hand, if Manuel's policy in Asia Minor was a deliberate reorganization of border territories for military defense, then this has military ramifications. Whether Hungary and Antioch were Byzantine clients is also militarily significant. The question of the nature and function of *pronoia* will be deferred to Chapter Six, but the extent and importance of *pronoia* is central to an understanding of the Komnenian army. Finally, the ethnicity of the Byzantine army is related to both the topic of *pronoia* and to the army's place in Byzantine society.

How did Byzantine influence in Hungary and Antioch affect Byzantine military power? Our sources do not indicate that Manuel's achievements in Hungary and Antioch provided any substantial military benefit. The Myriokephalon campaign was delayed while Manuel fruitlessly waited for Hungarian auxiliaries. The Antiochene division was the first to be routed at Myriokephalon, and this precipitated the general collapse of the Byzantine army. Manuel's successors were unable to muster either Antiochene or Hungarian support. What was the value of Manuel's forty years of warfare if the result was a vassalage that was merely personal, a tie to Manuel that resulted in meager military benefits, and no loyalty after his death? Magdalino correctly asserts that Manuel did not add to the assets created by John II.³ But the lack of improvement in the Byzantine military situation coincided with a more complex political environment. Manuel's

¹ Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos* (Cambridge, 1993), 104, 105-08.

² Magdalino, 9-10.

³ Magdalino, 3.

failure to eliminate any of his foes meant a real decline in Byzantium's military position relative to each of its enemies. Manuel's diplomacy, and his concept of universal empire, was an elaborate fiction that could not survive a serious military threat. Although Myriokephalon was not in fact the military catastrophe that chroniclers tend to assert, it nonetheless destroyed the flimsy diplomatic structure that was the major accomplishment of Manuel's reign. Venetian aggression and the incompetent emperors who followed Manuel combined to destroy what was left of the empire.

There is little evidence that Manuel had a consistent policy in Asia Minor. He wanted to control Antioch, and occasionally directed his attention to other problems in Asia Minor, although usually on an ad hoc basis. The only exceptions to this were his fortifications in the regions of Pergamon, Atramyttion, and Neokastra. Manuel had a Syrian policy that consisted of diplomatic and military interludes in support of and against the Crusader kingdoms, but his policy in Asia Minor was reactive, usually determined by Seljuk threats. This was expediency rather than policy-making. Finally, was the army primarily composed of foreign elements? Historians have accepted this thesis, relying upon Choniates' statement about *pronoia* at the end of his description of Manuel's reign.⁴ But Niketas Choniates was far from being an unbiased observer. He reacted angrily to the transfer of imperial land revenues to western soldiers. This is the result of the events of 1204—the crusader sack of Constantinople—of which Choniates is the most eloquent witness. The army, as it fights its way through the pages of Choniates and Kinnamos, is composed of “native” Byzantine soldiers. The chroniclers describe the presence of many foreigners, but Byzantines, *Rhomaioi*, whatever their ethnic heritage, are usually the officers, and Byzantine natives provide most of the cavalry.

The question of how prevalent foreign elements were in the Byzantine army may be less important than historians have supposed. The claim that the army was composed of mercenaries is seductive. According to this argument, the disaster of 1204 proved the danger

⁴ Niketas Choniates, *Niketae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. Van Dieten, CFHB (Berlin, 1975), 208–09. Choniates complains that imperial inspections previously ensured that the Byzantine soldiers were fit and well equipped. He claims that Manuel's policy of giving grants of provision money encouraged the unwarlike to join the army in the expectation of receiving cash grants. He also says that these men were not inspected, and they were increasingly foreigners.

of involvement with western military powers. Our question is the same one that troubled the Komnenian emperors: which soldiers were most effective? Their answer was to employ good soldiers from everywhere. We should not forget that this had long been standard Byzantine policy. Basil II remained in power in part because he received six thousand Rus, “foreigners,” from Prince Vladimir of Kiev. If some disaster had befallen the Byzantine Empire shortly after Basil's reign, and these men had turned on his successors, doubtless the same arguments would be made: that the army was no longer primarily Byzantine, and that it was the composition of the army that precipitated the destruction of the empire.

Initial Actions

The first appearance of tactical combat in Manuel's reign is in 1146, during the emperor's retreat from Ikonion. The ostensible purpose of this campaign was to punish the Seljuk sultan Mas'ud, whose countrymen had been plundering Byzantine possessions in Asia Minor. In fact, Niketas Choniates indicates that Manuel's goal was somewhat more ambitious: to besiege and conquer the Seljuk capital, Ikonion. Shortly before Manuel's campaign against the Seljuk Turks, Prince Raymond of Antioch had attacked Byzantine cities in Cilicia; a fleet and an army were sent to reinforce this province. Turkish attacks between 1143 and 1146, however, demonstrated how tenuous John's territorial gains really were. Upon John's death, Mas'ud's Turks ravaged the area near the sea of Marmora. They took Melangeia, a city just east of Nicaea.⁵ Manuel's campaign against Ikonion would have re-established Byzantine power in eastern Anatolia. Manuel advanced up the Maiander valley, and at Philomelion fought a battle that opened the way to Ikonion. The tactics used during Manuel's subsequent retreat from Ikonion resemble most Komnenian military actions against the Turks. According to Choniates, the Turks set up ambushes and occupied wooded ground along the line of march. Manuel's army had difficulty retreating, before finally reaching safety.⁶ Choniates provides little specific detail

⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 52.

⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 53. John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, John

about Byzantine tactics during the retreat, but mentions that Manuel overturned a Turk with his lance. The Turk was armed with a bow, and apparently possessed no *mêlée* weapons. Previous contacts with the Turkish soldiers John and Alexios fought suggest that Byzantines were more heavily armed than their Turkish opponents, so there is little new information here. Kinnamos, however, offers more detail about this campaign, particularly about the battle outside Ikonion, which Choniates largely ignores.

Since the action at Philomelion is the first time our sources describe Manuel conducting a tactical action, it deserves attention. According to Kinnamos, Mas'ud, the Turkish sultan, placed part of his forces within the city, another on the slopes behind the city, and the third part with himself to the right of the city, in the space along a wooded ridge between Philomelion and a fortress called Kaballa. Manuel's army was divided into two: a main body under Manuel and a rear-guard. Manuel took his division and directed it against the Turkish forces on the wooded ridge. Several points are of interest in Kinnamos' description. First, when Manuel wished to maneuver his army toward the ridge, he ordered his standard-bearer in that direction in expectation that the army would follow. Second, the emperor organized his forces, although we are not told which troops composed which divisions. Manuel took the left wing, facing the best of the Turkish troops. The Byzantines attacked, the Turks withdrew when the charge met their line.⁷ This Turkish force withdrew, and Manuel was impetuously lured into pursuing it. Meanwhile, the Byzantine rear-guard, whom Kinnamos describes as "the other army of the Romans," was ambushed by the garrison of Ikonion and by a tactical reserve Mas'ud had hidden behind the city.

This battle appears to have been a carefully devised Turkish plan to lure the emperor's main army away from the city while two-thirds of the Turkish army descended upon the remaining Byzantine troops. Manuel was barely able to regain control over his army after returning from a fruitless pursuit of the Turkish division he had put to flight. The next day, he was able to press forward to Ikonion but deemed it impossible to besiege the city. It is debatable whether the

Kinnamos, tr. C. Brand (New York, 1976), 46 ff. Kinnamos' account, drawn from the perspective of a common soldier, accurately describes the confusion that must have occurred when an imperial army tried to retreat, followed by the Turks.

⁷ Kinnamos, 42 ff.

emperor was surprised at the strength of Ikonion's fortifications, or whether the mauling of the previous day's battle prevented any coherent siege operation. Kinnamos' explanation—that the emperor was diverted by news of a Crusader army—is perhaps true, as a partial explanation. However, it appears unlikely that the emperor would have expended the tremendous resources involved in moving his army across all of Asia Minor to Ikonion simply to leave. His presence was not yet required in the capital; the Crusaders had not reached Byzantine territory. In this context, the Crusade was more likely a convenient excuse that enabled Manuel to extricate his army without shame. An alternative explanation also suggests itself. The emperor planned a siege, and presumably the equipment for such an operation would have moved with the second, slower division of his army. The defeat of this division probably resulted in sufficient damage to the army's siege-making capability that the emperor judged a siege impossible.

Unlike Choniates, Kinnamos provides a detailed description of Manuel's retreat from Ikonion. Kinnamos offers a confused account of a battle at Tzibrelitzemani following the emperor's decision to leave for Constantinople. The imperial army was encamped, and all of the action took place around this camp; the battle occurred, according to Kinnamos, because Manuel wanted to achieve something notable before returning to his new wife, Bertha of Sulzbach.⁸ The account that ensues is more likely a description of the ambushes and harassment that Choniates neglects to describe in detail. At Tzibrelitzemani, advanced elements of the Turkish army, led by Mas'ud, attacked the Byzantines in their camp.⁹ The emperor declined to advance with his own army, and instead assigned three units to two ambush groups, one composed of his relatives and men of the nobility, the other of two units from the army. Manuel kept a few men around him and advanced toward the Turks. The subsequent action indicates that Manuel either outpaced his ambush troops or placed himself in command of the vanguard. Upon reaching a hillock, the emperor saw the Turkish advance guard of five hundred in front of the main army and ordered his ambush troops to join him. There-

⁸ Kinnamos, 47.

⁹ Kinnamos, 50. Kinnamos reports that later in the battle Manuel encountered the vanguard of the Turkish army, with Mas'ud and the entire Turkish force following.

upon, the whole Byzantine force was, according to Kinnamos, in peril of being encircled by the rear-guard of the Turkish army. Manuel avoided this by ordering his entire force, his own unit and the three "ambush" units, to charge the Turkish line. Marching back toward his camp, Manuel had the bowmen from one of the ambush groups, commanded by Kotertzes, remain behind and ambush the Turkish pursuers. Nevertheless, the Turks advanced quickly, pressing the retreating imperial forces hard. Manuel's impetuous venture was rescued only by the appearance of the main Byzantine army, which had advanced from its camp.

This battle exemplifies the difficulties the Byzantines faced when fighting the Seljuk Turks. Manuel's initial ignorance of the proximity of the Turkish troops prevented him from advancing with his full army. Turkish attacks upon fortified camps are described in Anna Komnene's account of Alexios' last campaign in Asia Minor and were a constant feature of Byzantine-Turkish warfare. Because of the fluid nature of Turkish tactics, it was difficult for a commander in a fortified camp to determine the number of troops facing him, or whether an attack was a diversion or a serious assault. The countermeasures that Manuel employed—enticing the enemy to attack one group, in order to ambush it with others—were standard means of fighting lightly armed mounted foes. Pitched battles were aberrations when Byzantine armies advanced into Seljuk territory. The battle at Ikonion was the only such battle during Manuel's 1146 campaign. Nevertheless, the Turkish division facing Manuel melted away from the emperor's main attack. When Manuel discovered that the sultan, with his army, was in front of him, he was surprised. Here, as at Tzibrelitzemani, one can discern a pattern of Byzantine skirmishing against the Turks. Byzantine outriders were never adept at out-scouting their Turkish opponents. At Tzibrelitzemani Manuel was forced to fight his way past a Turkish formation sent to surround him and prevent his retreat.

As usual, Turkish pursuit of the retreating troops lasted until the full Byzantine army arrived on the scene. Procuring supplies while at some distance from the staging camps (*aplekta*) was a constant problem for the Byzantines in their conflicts with the Seljuks.¹⁰ The

¹⁰ *Aplekta* were the Byzantine army's staging camps, where supplies were gathered and troops mustered. In Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *Three Military Treatises*

Seljuks avoided combat wherever possible and so prevented the Byzantine army from gaining a decisive victory until the campaign season ended or until they ran out of supplies (a strategy reminiscent of the Byzantines' own practices during Alexios' campaign against the Normans in 1108). Pitched battles seldom brought an advantage to the force defending its own territory. Lighter armament was only one reason the Seljuk armies fled from Byzantine forces. The Turks stood and fought the French on the Maiander River, near Laodikeia during the Second Crusade, and the Battle of Myriokephalon (1176) certainly proves that the Turks were capable of fighting Byzantine forces on an even footing in hand-to-hand combat. Under most circumstances, the Turks refused to engage Byzantine armies because they recognized that they had more to lose from a pitched battle than did the Byzantines: When the emperor left, the territory would still be theirs. Both Mas'ud and Kilij Arslan used this strategy against Manuel.

After Manuel's army rescued him from the Seljuks, the Byzantine cavalry proved unable to bring the Turks to battle; the imperial horses tired more quickly than those of their opponents.¹¹ Kinnamos also mentions archers accompanying the emperor. We must assume that this meant mounted bowmen, since these men kept pace with the emperor's pursuit of the Turks. This also implies that the emperor's personal troops were not similarly armed. Therefore, the force with which the emperor pursued the Turks consisted of both heavily and lightly armed mounted men. The heavy cavalry were sent out to lure the Turks into an ambush. The ambushing force would itself have been composed of a combined light and heavy cavalry. During the fighting retreat, the emperor's army needed to be tactically flexible; presumably the pairing of archers with heavier, lance-bearing troops provided both shock and skirmishing capability. Manuel's aim after the failed expedition to Ikonion was merely to bring his

on *Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. John Haldon (Vienna, 1990), 80-81, a number of *aplekta* are mentioned: Malagina, on the Sangarios River, Dorylaion, Amorion, Koloneia, Kaisareia, and Dazimon. Komnenian *aplekta* also included Lopadion, mentioned as a mustering point for John II's armies. Manuel may have rebuilt Dorylaion and Soublaion as advanced staging points for his wars against the Seljuk Turks.

¹¹ Kinnamos, 49. In this case, the horse that tired was Manuel's. We may assume that the emperor's horse was among the best of the Byzantine mounts, and that the other soldiers with him would also have had similarly exhausted horses.

army back to Constantinople. Despite what Kinnamos says of Manuel's desire to display his personal prowess, the emperor was probably not interested in engaging the Turks, for they would not have entered into battle unless conditions favored them. The tactical action at Tzibrelitzemani was initiated in order to give the Byzantine time to retreat, but it was not conducted with the main Byzantine army and was not intended to be a pitched battle. Manuel arrived in Constantinople with his army. This war, including its preparations, had taken two campaign seasons. By late 1146 the emperor was back in Constantinople, preparing to ease the passage of the Second Crusade through Byzantine territory. Choniates again reports that Manuel was surprised that he would have to manage the passage of the Crusaders, additional evidence that preparations for the Crusade were not the cause of Manuel's retreat from Ikonion.¹²

The arrival of the Second Crusade at Constantinople gives us the opportunity to compare Manuel's army with a western European army. The army of the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad Hohenstaufen skirmished with Byzantine scouts when "some of the Romans from the infantry regiments," killed one of Conrad's lieutenants near Adrianople, and plundered his goods.¹³ Choniates trivializes this incident, and does not mention a battle between Germans and Byzantines just outside the walls of Constantinople. Kinnamos describes this battle and details the tactical dispositions of the Byzantine army with some specificity; a rarity among either chronicler. It therefore deserves attention beyond its minor tactical and strategic value.

Why did the Byzantines believe that every Crusade was a secret attempt to destroy Byzantine state? Certainly they were wary of the motives of the western potentates who led these military expeditions, but the Byzantines also mistrusted the Seljuks, Hungarians, and Normans. Byzantine emperors were obligated to help the Crusaders by virtue of their common Christianity as well as to prevent their armies from pillaging his territories for supplies. This meant allowing large,

¹² Choniates, *Historia*, 61–62. Manuel prepared by mustering the army and repairing the walls of Constantinople. Interestingly, Choniates says that Manuel issued coats of scale armor to his soldiers, and provided them with lances and horses (p. 62, ll. 95–98). This statement probably refers only to the units stationed near the capital.

¹³ Kinnamos, 71–72. The soldiers who plundered the German camp had been sent by the emperor to skirmish with the Germans and prevent them from plundering Byzantine territory.

potentially hostile armies to enter the Byzantine heartland in Thrace and Macedonia. When the empire fought the Normans and Pechenegs, imperial strategy sought to prevent enemy forces from entering the plains of Thessalonike and Thrace, respectively. If the emperor treated the Crusaders as the enemies he feared they would become, he would surely alienate them. This might lead to the kind of military assault the Byzantines always feared. Because of this fear, Byzantine efforts to obtain Antioch had to be modified during Manuel's reign. The emperor settled for mere titular sovereignty.¹⁴ The ostensible objective of the Second Crusade was recovery of the lost lands of Edessa, which had fallen to Zangi of Aleppo in 1144. Opposing this expedition would have destroyed Byzantium's ability to influence events in the Levant. Manuel's only option was to allow Conrad of Germany and Louis of France unlimited access to the Byzantine heartland, from which Constantinople was easily threatened. A more prudent strategy would have been to divert them from the ultimate prize, the capital, but Byzantine emperors had no good options when Crusades passed through their territories. Providing food and markets for so many soldiers as they crossed the Balkans while forestalling foraging required great skill. At the same time, as much as both sides strove to avoid military confrontation, conflict of some sort was inevitable when a large army passed through the territory of another state: it was all the more dangerous because the Crusaders invariably traversed the richest and most important Byzantine lands.

Conrad arrived at Constantinople with his army in September of 1147. Our sources give us no clear reason for the dispute between Conrad and Manuel once the Germans reached the capital. Kinnamos fabricates a letter, supposedly written by Manuel to Conrad, in which the emperor states that a visiting army risks retaliation from the local populace if a leader fails to control his men and prevent them from plundering the territories through which is passing.¹⁵ Conrad's men were foraging and requisitioning supplies from the local population, and Byzantine soldiers had killed one of Conrad's officers outside of Adrianople and looted his possessions. Whatever the real reason, the dispute escalated into a battle outside

¹⁴ Magdalino, 66.

¹⁵ Kinnamos, 77.

Constantinople's walls. Neither Conrad nor Manuel was present; each placed his forces under the command of subordinates. Was this because each feared the results of a defeat if he were in command, or because the skirmish was not important? Whatever the answer, the result of the battle, a Byzantine success, was that Conrad negotiated with Manuel.

The battle outside Constantinople offers an excellent description of the tactical organization of Byzantine forces. Kinnamos describes the Byzantine forces: "He [Manuel] ordered Prosouch and Tzikandyles and many of the other Roman generals to lead out a sufficient force and to stand confronting the Germans. They were organized as follows: the most unwarlike, common part of the army stood far forward in four units; thereafter, the well-armed and mounted; after these came those riding swift footed horses; and finally, at the back of the army were the "Scyths" [Pechenegs or Cumans], and "Persians" [Turks], and the Romans' archers."¹⁶ Thus, the "least warlike" (presumably the light infantry, the *psiloi*) formed a screen in front of the whole army; behind them stood the *kataphraktoi*, the heavy-armed cavalry. Unfortunately, we lack a detailed description of the battle that resulted from these preparations; we only know that the Byzantines were victorious. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the Turks, Cumans, and Byzantine archers were positioned to the rear, in back of the lighter armed cavalry.

Why would the two most flexible elements of the Byzantine army, the light horsemen and the archers, be positioned behind the less flexible elements? One would normally assume that these elements would be stationed in front of the main army, skirmishing and harassing the enemy. The answer lies in the tactical situation of the Byzantine army. The army met the Germans just outside Constantinople, near the walls. The description of events leading up to the battle

¹⁶ Kinnamos, 77, ll. 13-20.

"τὸν Προσοῦχ καὶ τὸν Τζικανδύλην καὶ πλείστους ἄλλους τῶν Ῥωμαίων στρατηγῶν ἐκέλευε στράτευμα ἐπαγομένους ἱκανὸν ἀντιμετώπους Ἀλαμανοῖς ἵστασθαι. τάξασθαι μέντοι ὡδε. τὸ μὲν ἀπολεμώτερον καὶ ὡς περ ἀγελαῖον τοῦ στρατοῦ πόρρωθεν καὶ ὡς ἀπὸ σημείων στήναι τεττάρων· μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ὅσον ὀπλιτικὸν καὶ κατάφρακτον· ἐξῆς δὲ τοὺς ὅσοι ταχυπόδων ἐπέβαινον ἵππων· τελευταίου δὲ καὶ μετὰ μέτωπον Σκύθας ἅμα Πέρσαις καὶ τὸ Ῥωμαίων τοξικόν;" For the Cumans, see: Choniates, 94. The Cumans carried quivers of arrows, curved bows, and arrows. Their personal weapons were spears, and Choniates says that they rode same horse into battle that they rode for other activities. This appears to be in contrast to a Byzantine practice of riding a palfrey, while preserving the war-horses for actual combat.

implies that there was little room (or opportunity) for skirmishing. The terrain was known; there was no need for preliminary scouting. The location and composition of the enemy force was also known. In most of the battles we have examined, preliminary skirmishing and maneuvering brought two armies to their positions on the battlefield. Here, the Byzantines dispensed with these preparatory actions. They disregarded the usual positioning of skirmishers and light cavalry in front of the main army and placed them behind the heavy cavalry. This accords with the disposition of Manuel's army against the Seljuks at Tzouroulos, where the lighter-armed troops were kept further back in order to cover a retreat or to exploit a victory.

Following this battle outside Constantinople, the Germans were ferried across the Bosphoros, into Asia Minor. They advanced east and were defeated outside Dorylaion. The Turks lured them into a fruitless pursuit of some skirmishers and turned upon the German cavalry when it had become disordered and exhausted. Choniates thereupon delivers one of his best descriptions of a Turkish army in action. This occurred in 1147/48, when the Turks and the French met on the Maiander River, again near Dorylaion. Most descriptions of the Turkish army center on the Turkish light cavalry to such an extent that the entire Seljuk Turk army seems composed of light cavalry. At the Maiander, the Seljuk force displays an interesting variety of troop types.

The Turks, "massing in phalanxes on the banks of the river, blocked the Latin troops from crossing over." Later, they appeared with a force of infantry and cavalry; both groups were bowmen.¹⁷ In the subsequent battle the Turks placed their infantry archers along the riverbank to harass the French when they tried to cross. Choniates describes both the armament of the French and the effect of the Turkish bow on the French troops.¹⁸ The westerners carried

¹⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 67 (ll. 50-52), 68. Transl., H. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, 1984), 39.

"οἱ δὲ εἰς φάλαγγας πυκνωθέντες καὶ ταῖς ὀχθαῖς ἐσφραστῶτες τοῦ ποταμοῦ Ἰ Μαϊάνδρος οὗτος ἢ οὐκ εἶον ὅλως τὰ Λατινικὰ στρατεύματα διελθεῖν."

¹⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 68. As Magoulias notes, Choniates confuses the German and French expeditions. The defeat at Bathys, mentioned on page 67, involved the Germans (October, 1147). The action that Choniates mentions on page 68, against the Turks on the Maiander River, involved the French army under King Louis VII (January 1148).

lances, swords, and daggers, and their armor was largely unaffected by the Turks' arrows. When the Germans charged Turkish skirmishers, they were lured into an ambush that destroyed their military effectiveness. When the French charged across the Maiander River, by contrast, they caught the Turkish infantry and cavalry by surprise, shattering them. Kinnamos tells us that the French cavalry was more skilled than the German cavalry (the French also had swifter, better horses than did the Germans), but that the German infantry had the advantage over the French foot soldiers.¹⁹ Whether better horses, better tactics, or a better choice of route permitted the French to prevail where the Germans failed, the Byzantines considered the French to be more formidable in cavalry battles than the Germans.²⁰

The Western Campaigns

The next campaign Manuel commanded took place in 1147–49, when the emperor attempted to take the citadel of Kerkyra from Roger II, the Norman king of Southern Italy. Roger had taken advantage of Manuel's preoccupation with the Second Crusade to attack Kerkyra, raid Corinth, sack Thebes, and to attempt to take the fortress town of Monemvasia in the southern Peloponnesos. Kinnamos does not describe how the Byzantine army was mustered for this campaign. Choniates reports that the emperor levied the eastern and western *tagmata*.²¹ Neither author gives specific numbers of soldiers, but Choniates mentions that the army numbered in the tens of thousands.²²

The siege of Kerkyra resembles the Crusader's siege of Constantinople in 1204, when the most important actions were taken by sol-

¹⁹ Kinnamos, 84–85. Kinnamos also states that Conrad, when his army joined with the French to travel east, could not bear the taunts of the French, presumably about his own defeat, and returned to Constantinople.

²⁰ Magdalino, 50–51. The French king Louis VII considered marrying one of his relatives to one of Manuel's nephews. This might have affected contemporaneous Byzantine attitudes toward the French.

²¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 77, l. 13. "Συλλέγεται οὖν τὰ ἐῷα καὶ ἐσπέρια τάγματα." "Therefore he gathered the eastern and western *tagmata*."

²² Choniates, *Historia*, 77, ll. 20–21. "αἱ δὲ πεζικαὶ δυνάμεις ἐς μυριάδας ἡθροίσθησαν" "And the strength of the foot soldiers were numbered in tens of thousands."

diers attacking from towers and ladders attached to ships.²³ As in previous encounters with western troops, missile-fire seems to have done little damage to the defenders. The imperial forces, including the Venetian auxiliaries, occupied the city itself but the Norman garrison took refuge in the citadel. Byzantine troops, protecting themselves with large oval shields and armed with swords, attempted to assault the citadel's towers from ladders mounted on ships, but the weight of the attackers broke the ladders, and the attacking soldiers fell into the water and perished. The citadel was finally starved into submission. Choniates' account of the siege leaves little doubt that despite the emperor's considerable preparations, the citadel, with a well-trained garrison manning stone-throwers, was too well fortified and defended for the Byzantine army to take. The general in charge of the siege, Stephenos Kontostephanos, was killed when a stone hurled from the battlements shattered a siege engine he was supervising. The stone shattered the wooden engine, showering the soldiers nearby with deadly fragments. After the stronghold was taken, the emperor installed a garrison of "stalwart Germans" to guard it. He then turned to Serbia, since the weather and rough seas prevented immediate reprisals against the Sicilian Normans.²⁴

Manuel's retaliatory campaign took place between 1155 and 1158. Choniates gives only the most rudimentary details about these Italian maneuvers.²⁵ Kinnamos, by contrast, provides sufficient detail to chart the Byzantine army's movement, telling us which cities were seized and when. Neither author provides tactical detail, so it is only

²³ Villehardouin, *Histoire de la conquête de Constantinople* (Paris, 1981), 99–103. The Crusaders used ships to transport them to the seaward walls of Constantinople, on the Golden Horn. They scaled these walls by means of ladders.

²⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 89. The importance of Kerkyra to the Byzantine Empire should not be underestimated. As Choniates notes, it provided a staging point for further Sicilian ventures against the Byzantines. In Byzantine hands, it was likewise a natural mustering point for imperial forces that were to be directed against the Norman kingdom. In the 1149 campaign that Manuel contemplated waging against the Normans, only poor weather prevented the emperor's personal involvement.

²⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 95–96. Magoulias, 55. Choniates says only "the two leaders sailed for Sicily [1152] and engaged the king's forces . . . and very nearly taking Brindisi by siege [April–May 1156.] But Fortune did not smile genuinely upon their brave deeds in battle, . . . for the king gathered an even greater force, collecting a number of mercenary troops and renewed the fight. Engaging the Romans in battle, he retrieved the defeat, prevailed against them and took them captive. Komnenos and Doukas were incarcerated; in one brief moment, all that the Romans had achieved by way of toil and huge expenditures was overturned."

possible to discuss imperial strategy during the Italian campaigns. Manuel commissioned Michael Palaiologos to raise a force of mercenaries and lancers to conduct the campaign, while the emperor conducted wars against the Cumans, Hungarians, and Serbians.

Manuel entrusted the Apulian campaign to Michael Palaiologos and John Doukas, both of whom held the high imperial rank of *sebastos*. They were sent to Italy in 1155 to negotiate an alliance with the newly crowned German emperor Frederick I. If they failed in this endeavor, they were to employ the funds that Manuel placed at their disposal to raise an army and claim Apulia (or "Italy," as Kinnamos refers to the territory). Michael and John found Frederick unwilling to form an alliance with Manuel, for such an alliance would have offered the western emperor few benefits and would have legitimized a Byzantine attempt to acquire southern Italy, which Frederick wanted to control. Palaiologos and Doukas therefore arranged an alliance with Robert of Bassonville, a nephew of Roger II who fallen from power when his cousin, William I, became king upon Roger's death. Alexander of Conversano, ruler of the city of Gravina until his deposition by Roger II, was also party to this alliance. The Byzantine effort therefore included several dispossessed Norman lords, and two imperial officials with an abundance of ready cash.

Ancona was the imperial headquarters for these activities. In 1157, after imperial forces had been forced out of Italy as a result of the defeat outside Brindisi, Manuel sent Alexios Axouch to Italy with a second army. Ancona was his base. The knights from Ancona were also the most important mercenary element in John Doukas' and Michael Palaiologos' army; Kinnamos implies that the expedition was doomed when they demanded double pay and then deserted. Ancona was a logical choice for the imperial base. It was far enough north that envoys could easily be sent to Frederick when he was south of the Alps, and it was sufficiently close to Apulia that troops and money could be transported south to the area of Byzantine military operations.

Palaiologos and Doukas, allied with Robert of Bassonville and Alexander of Conversano, moved down the coast with their army. First, they took Viesti, then Bari, Trani, and Giovinazzo. This provided the Byzantines with a strip of coastline centered upon the important port city of Bari, the last Byzantine possession in Italy, lost in 1071. The Normans controlled Andria, slightly inland and apparently heavily fortified, and Molfetta, a fortified position on the

coast that the Byzantines were never able to take. After imperial troops occupied the Apulian coast (1155), the Normans, commanded by Asclethin of Andria, reacted by moving an army to Trani and then to Barletta. Michael Palaiologos defeated these Norman forces, and in the aftermath of the defeat, the Byzantines were able to seize Andria. This victory enabled the Byzantines to move freely in Apulia, although the Normans reinforced their garrison at Molfetta following this defeat. Michael Palaiologos' death in the course of the campaign left the army under the command of Doukas. Doukas appears to have been Michael Palaiologos' junior partner in the negotiations with Frederick I and in the military actions that followed. Doukas marched the army south, taking Monopoli, and met with Robert of Bassonville at Brindisi. From there, the combined forces marched west, taking Massafra and Mottola. At Mottola Bassonville and Doukas defeated another Norman force, under the command of Flameng. Abandoning their attempt to take Taranto, which was strongly fortified and impervious to attack, the imperial forces moved back east, again taking Monopoli by siege. Then imperial forces seized Ostuni and Brindisi, although they were unable to secure the citadel.

The conquest of Brindisi marked the apex of Byzantine military power in Manuel's Italian campaign. After this, Doukas mismanaged his alliance with Robert Bassonville. At this time William's men were attacking Robert's holdings; Michael Palaiologos had earlier refused to send him aid, and following this Bassonville became increasingly interested in obtaining money from the Byzantines (rather than relying upon his unreliable imperial allies), undoubtedly to finance his own forces. He accompanied Doukas to Taranto, but when William mustered his full army and began marching it north to face the Byzantines at Brindisi, Robert departed, ending his alliance with the Byzantines. Simultaneously, the knights from Ancona deserted, since Doukas refused to pay them double wages. The arrival of Alexios Komnenos Bryennios with some ships did not retrieve the Byzantine situation in any respect. Alexios had been ordered to bring soldiers, but he merely brought his empty ships to Brindisi.

William arrived at Brindisi, defeated the Byzantine forces on both land and sea, and in a day retrieved all which had been lost in three years. Manuel heard about this defeat and the capture of John Doukas and Alexios Bryennios, and sent Alexios Axouch to Ancona to raise another army. Ancona remained allied to the emperor, and

Axouch was able to drive inland to Cassino, southeast of Rome. By this time William II had retaken all of the Byzantine conquests in Apulia. As Kinnamos says, "Alexios Komnenos and Doukas . . . had become captive to the Sicilians' lord [and] again ruined matters. For as they had already pledged to the Sicilians many things not then desired by the emperor, they robbed the Romans of very great and noble achievements. [They] . . . very likely deprived the Romans of the cities too soon."²⁶ In other words, Doukas and Komnenos-Bryennios had been pressured to surrender the possessions they had taken for Manuel. The emperor had already spent thirty thousand pounds of gold on the expedition. He judged that with three years of warfare come to naught; the wisest course was to obtain the best peace possible.

What was the purpose of such a tremendous expenditure of wealth on expeditions that came to nothing? We should remember that the Italian war was the longest sustained offensive campaign conducted by any Komnenian emperor. What was its purpose, and what strategy did Manuel, through Michael Palaiologos, pursue? First, we should recognize that the emperor was distracted by a defensive war against Hungary and Serbia. Manuel could not go to Italy himself, although he considered it.²⁷ Second, the Italian war was envisioned as reprisal for the Norman invasion of Kerkyra and Hellas while Manuel was busy with the Second Crusade. Roger II had raided Byzantine possessions without permanently occupying territory. The Normans transported economically useful tradesmen, such as weavers, to Italy. Byzantine control of Apulia would make any expedition against the empire much more difficult for the Normans, and would effectively prevent a repetition of the Norman sack of Corinth, Thebes, and Athens. Large tracts of territory were not necessary to accomplish this. On the contrary, the possession of a few bases along the coast would prevent the Norman king from turning his attention away from his own homeland. The imperial armies only rarely advanced into the interior during the course of the Italian campaign.

²⁶ Kinnamos, 172.

²⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 91. While Michael Palaiologos organized and conducted the expedition against the Normans in Apulia, Manuel organized the Byzantine land forces at Pelagonia. Manuel also parried a Hungarian invasion that had besieged Branicevo. A Byzantine army under Basil Tzintziloukes defeated a Hungarian force, and the approach of Manuel with a second Byzantine army forced the Hungarians to withdraw.

Gravina was taken, but that had been the territory of Count Alexander, Manuel's ally, and was doubtless a condition of his support. Cassino was taken late in 1157, but by that time most of Byzantine Apulia had been lost, which suggests that Alexios Axouch's expedition was an attempt to salvage a better peace from the Normans, rather than a serious attempt at conquest. The imperial forces held a few coastal cities, but they never threatened Norman control of the interior. The occupation of Viesti, Bari, and Brindisi was enough to divert William I, the new Norman king, from his expedition to Sicily. Had the Byzantines defeated the Normans at Brindisi, it is doubtful whether the meager forces at Doukas' disposal could have taken more territory. So, the Byzantines took the Apulian cities to prevent Norman raids on Epiros and Hellas, and because they were conveniently close to the Byzantine ports of Kerkyra and Dyrrachion. Kinnamos remarks that Ancona was chosen as the Byzantine base in order to humble the Venetians. This may have been another reason for the Apulian campaign: to maintain Byzantine control of the lower Adriatic. The Venetians did not aid the Byzantines in their Italian venture, unlike the earlier campaigns against the Normans at Kerkyra.

What was the strategy of Michael Palaiologos and John Doukas in their attack on Apulia? First, they obtained mercenaries. Ancona provided "knights,"—mounted, heavy armed cavalry—and these supplemented the soldiers supplied by the emperor and by Robert of Bassonville. The imperial army occupied the coastal cities, Viesti, Bari, Trani, and eventually Brindisi. Andria, a bit inland, was also taken. Thus the imperial forces obtained control of the territory directly across the mouth of the Adriatic from Dyrrachion. Then the combined forces moved inland, taking Mottola, Massafra, and Gravina. These last three cities mark the limit of Byzantine control of the interior of Apulia: Taranto was too strong to besiege, so imperial forces were not able to advance westward into the province of Basilicata. This was probably never a consideration. Robert of Bassonville and his men were essential to the Byzantines' plans: Palaiologos had too few men of his own to conduct offensive operations. Bassonville's center of strength appears to have been near Brindisi. It is not realistic to assume that he would have provided support for expeditions westward which, by giving territory to Manuel, lessened his importance. Palaiologos and Doukas took the cities they could with the troops at their disposal, and we should not assume that

they were expected to do more than they did. Manuel was disappointed when the capture of Doukas and Bryennios resulted in the loss of the Byzantine conquests of the past three years, but he is nowhere said to have been disappointed in the extent of the conquests themselves.²⁸ We must assume that the conquest of Apulia was the object of the Italian wars, and that this was very nearly accomplished when William arrived to defeat the Byzantine army and disrupt Manuel's plan.

Hungarians, Serbians, and Cumans

The military power of the Hungarian kingdom, the Serbian principality, and Cuman tribe directly threatened the empire's control of the Balkans. Wars against these three entities were more important to the security of the empire than campaigns in Italy, however expensive and lengthy they might become. Our sources offer sparse detail about the tactics of these campaigns. Choniates reports that battles were fought, but does not go into extensive detail. Kinnamos' account barely mentions these events and instead concentrates upon Manuel's diplomatic maneuvering.²⁹ Manuel sought to control Hungarian policy, to prevent constant Hungarian invasions of Byzantine possessions on the Adriatic Sea. Stephen IV of Hungary had fled to the emperor for refuge, and Manuel tried to install him on the Hungarian throne. Stephen was so hated by his people that this proved impossible. Later, Manuel tried to install Bela, the brother of the legitimate King Stephen III, upon the throne. Bela married Maria, Manuel's daughter, and the emperor hoped that this union would result in substantial Byzantine influence upon Hungarian foreign policy. The diplomacy involved in these maneuvers is less relevant to this study than the military actions that resulted from it. The first military effect of these manipulations was that Manuel found himself continually drawn into Hungarian affairs. Stephen IV was never able to maintain himself in Hungary without Byzantine help because the Hungarians correctly believed that he was a Byzantine puppet. Stephen IV's ineptitude eventually resulted in his death; his own

²⁸ Kinnamos, 172-73.

²⁹ Kinnamos, 211-16 ff.

councilors poisoned him. This Byzantine interference in the internal affairs of Hungary finally provoked Stephen III to outright warfare. In 1165 Stephen seized the Byzantine city of Sirmion, and he then besieged Zeugminon. When his army took this city, Manuel decided to personally direct the Hungarian war. He traveled to Serdika, where he mustered his army.

After retaking Zeugminon, which had not been sacked by the Hungarians, but which was pillaged by the Byzantine army,³⁰ the imperial forces fought a major battle with the Hungarians at Semlin, in 1167. Kinnamos and Choniates provide good descriptions of the tactical arrangements of both armies. Kinnamos tells us that Andronikos Kontostephanos, the general that Manuel assigned as army commander, ordered the Cumans and Turks, plus a few lancers, to be in the vanguard. Behind these were the Byzantine regiments. Following the cavalry were infantry, archers, and an armored regiment of Turks. Finally, there followed the picked Byzantine troops, the Germans and Turks. Andronikos stationed himself in the rear, surrounded by the emperor's personal troops. These included the guard regiments and the emperor's companions, plus mercenary Italians, and a Serbian regiment consisting of five hundred infantry with large shields and spears.³¹

According to Kinnamos, the Hungarians arranged themselves according to their usual custom, with their best men in their vanguard. According to Choniates, the Hungarian leader Dionysios massed his troops in one large formation, without wings or differentiation between infantry or cavalry, and launched the whole at the Byzantines.³² Kontostephanos took advantage of this by ordering the mounted archers of the Byzantine force to shoot arrows at the Hungarians. When this archery fire enticed them to charge, the light troops were supposed to split apart and flee to the flanks, leaving the Hungarians in the center. The arrows of the archers were also expected to break up the Hungarian charge. Kinnamos provides further information about how the Byzantine soldiers were drawn up for battle. The troops in

³⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 134-36. Kinnamos, 239.

³¹ Kinnamos, 271.

³² Kinnamos, 272. Choniates, *Historia*, 155-56. This is a topos of Byzantine battle descriptions. The "barbarians" are always disorganized, the Byzantines always more clever. The Turks likewise appear disorganized when fighting the Byzantines, yet they always seem to be able to out-maneuver the imperial army.

front were Turks, Cumans, and a few lancers. The Byzantine right wing under Andronikos Lepardas consisted of picked Byzantines and Germans with some Turks, the left wing of troops under *taxiarchs*. Other units were stationed beyond the flanks of the main wings in order to attack the Hungarian rear guard and to come to the aid of any Byzantine units in trouble. Kinnamos also tells us that Kontostephanos, in the Byzantine center, had with him the troops normally around the emperor: this description probably indicates both the Varangian guard and also the picked courtiers and companions of the emperor. Kontostephanos also had the Serbian contingent and the Italian mercenaries. Perhaps these were the same mercenaries and lancers that Michael Palaiologos had recruited when he was in Venice, for the campaign in Apulia.³³ The *taxiarchs* (commanders) that Choniates mentions correspond to the group of leaders paired with Andronikos Lepardas: Joseph Bryennios, George and Demetrios Branas, and the *sebastos* Constantine Aspietes. From Kinnamos' account it is probable that the "regiments of Romans," with Kogh Vasil, Philokales and Tatikios, were stationed on the Byzantine left. When the left wing was driven off, Kinnamos reports that Kogh Vasil and Tatikios' regiments remained on the field. Byzantine standard practice, as delineated in the *Praecepta Militaria* (ca. 965) and the *Strategikon* (ca. 600), was to use the infantry as a base, as guards for the camp and as a refuge for defeated cavalry. The archers, infantry, and armored Turkish regiments would therefore have been positioned in a line behind the rest of the Byzantine troops.

The battle began as Kontostephanos had planned. The Cumans, Turks, and lancers of the vanguard showered the Hungarians with arrows³⁴ The Hungarians charged, drove these troops back to the Sava River, and smashed the Byzantine left wing. Only the regiments of Kogh Vasil and Tatikios held out. The troops around Andronikos Kontostephanos in the center, and the Byzantine, German, and Turkish troops with Lepardas remained disciplined and unbroken. At this point Lepardas charged, aided by George Branas' troops, who suddenly reappeared. A fierce *mêlée* ensued, which ended only when Kontostephanos ordered his men to charge. Choniates describes this engagement rhetorically: the lances shattered, then the long

³³ Choniates, *Historia*, 91.

³⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 156.

swords were broken, then the Byzantine troops drew their maces, and the battle was decided. Choniates also reports that few imperial soldiers failed to strip an enemy of armor, or kill a Hungarian, suggesting that the Byzantine army had won a total victory. This, however, is belied by the fact that Kontostephanos, when he heard that the Hungarians might have received help from a German mercenary unit, took the Byzantine army and returned to Constantinople.³⁵ Nevertheless, it was a Byzantine victory, and Choniates is correct in ascribing this victory to superior Byzantine tactics.

Kommenian Tactical Doctrine

The battle at Semlin demonstrates several elements of Byzantine practice that were so standardized that they deserve mention as part of a Byzantine tactical doctrine practiced throughout the Komnenian period. The first of these elements was standard tactical procedure for most well organized medieval armies: division of the force into a vanguard, main body, and rear-guard. Both the Byzantines and the Crusader armies our sources mention made use of this formation on the march and in open field battle. The Turks used vanguards, and most of these armies also had light troops they used as outriders and skirmishers. Both Byzantine and western European armies divided themselves into "battles," or organizational divisions. Some of these units were organized by ethnicity, such as the Germans in Byzantine employ, as well as the Cumans, Latins, Turks, Italians and others. At Semlin, the Byzantines separated "picked" cavalry from the regular cavalry. This appears to be an innovation of the Komnenian period. In the manuals of Nikephoros Phokas, Nikephoros Ouranos, and the *Strategikon*, the best troops, with the heaviest armor, maces, and armored horses, are placed in front of the less well-armed and armored men in the same unit. Under the Komnenian emperors these men appear to have been separated into another division, which included the best of the mercenary *tagmata*.

The Byzantines, like their Hungarian opponents, relied on mailed lancers astride armored horses for their first charge. Alexios I found this tactic ineffective against the Norman cavalry, and won his war

³⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 157.

against them by avoiding battle. Manuel, by contrast, preferred decisive combat wherever possible. The *Præcepta Militaria* of Nicephoros Ouranos describes a standard formation that consisted in placing mace-armed cavalry in the front ranks of a triangular battle formation of cavalry. Lancers were stationed along the flanks, and mounted archers to the rear. Smaller detachments followed the main unit as flankers, giving tactical flexibility to this rigid formation.³⁶ The *Præcepta Militaria* describes a strategy of using lancers as they were employed in Antiquity, as skirmishers or pursuit cavalry; their purpose was to chase and kill stragglers after the enemy was routed. At Semlin, like most Byzantine battles of the Komnenian period, lance-bearing cavalry, whether western mercenaries or Byzantines, initiated and bore the brunt of the fighting. In this battle, the mace appears to have been the weapon of last resort, used only after the soldiers' lances and swords had been destroyed. We must also not overlook the fact that Choniates' account is rhetorical, and his description of the battle progressing through lance, sword, and mace is meant to demonstrate how hard-fought it was (it lasted until dusk), rather than to indicate an actual progression of events. However, Eustathios of Thessalonike, in his third oration, also mentions that the Hungarians feared the Byzantine mace.³⁷

Another element of Komnenian tactical doctrine was to station small, light-armed contingents of cavalry and infantry on the flanks of the main army. This appears in all Byzantine tactical manuals as well as in most accounts of Komnenian armies in battle. The historian must necessarily question whether a chronicler's account included such tactics because the chronicler thought that was what armies did, rather than because an author had specific information about "flankers" in a particular battle. The best explanation is that Komnenian armies, like other Byzantine, western European, and Islamic armies, found such units both necessary for scouting purposes and tactically useful. At Brindisi (1156), at Semlin (1167), and

³⁶ E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1995), 35–39, (armament); 39–45, (formations).

³⁷ In a recent dissertation, Andrew F. Stone has edited this and two other orations that include interesting military information. See his "Translation and Commentary on Two Orations (the 1174 and 1176 Epiphany Orations) of Eustathios of Thessalonike to the Emperor Manuel I Komnenos," Ph.D., U. of Western Australia, 1995), 383, 515–17 (the Byzantine mace), 494–95 (forts built in Anatolia), 534 (mock sea battles), 127–31 (siege of Zeugminon).

on the Maiander River (1177) against a picked force of Turks, the Komnenoi used flankers, ambushers, and other 'assault' troops. Their tactical use, as well as their performance, varied greatly. In Italy they were effective, but not effective enough to overcome superior Norman numbers. At Semlin, they appear to have been useless. On the Maiander, they were entirely successful, and caused the Turkish defeat. This descriptive variety is evidence enough that chroniclers did not only include them because they appeared in old military manuals. Indeed, there is no evidence, in the form of direct quotations, that our chroniclers read such manuals. There is too much variety and flexibility in our sources' descriptions of assault troops to suppose they were a mere literary topos. They were a real element of Byzantine forces under the Komnenian emperors, and a crucial one.

The equipment of these men is seldom specifically described. Their designation as "assault troops" was determined by their function. They were ambushers during the campaign of Myriocephalon (1176), as they were when Alexios I placed them in a ravine before his battle with Nikephoros Bryennios the elder. Such troops were supposed to be more lightly armed than main battle troops. The *Strategikon* calls these men "assault troops," *peltasts* or light cavalry. At Semlin, according to Choniates, they were ordered to swing around and attack the rear guard of the Hungarians.³⁸ Troopers who could dodge the flanks of an enemy army, and upon its rear would be light, maneuverable troops—in this case, cavalry. We can conclude that the use of skirmishers, or flankers, was another standard procedure of the Komnenian army.

Komnenian armies usually retained certain elite soldiers, presumably chosen from the *scholae* and guards, who surrounded the emperor or his chosen designate. These men differ from the "picked men" who occasionally constituted the wing of a Byzantine army. These men were formally attached to the emperor in some way.³⁹ In this

³⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 157.

³⁹ Kinnamos, 271. This passage describes the order of battle at Semlin, in which Kinnamos says that the troops with Kontostephanos himself were important men who usually were arrayed under the emperor when he went to war. Choniates, *Historia*, 159. Choniates describes rhetorically how Manuel often led out just his cavalry and bodyguards when attacking the Serbians, implying that this resulted in some sort of lightning campaign that frightened the Serbian ruler, Stephen Nemanja. What is important is that Manuel does appear to have had certain cavalry and

context we should note that the distinction between *tagmata* and *themata* is irrelevant during the Komnenian period. A better differentiation would be "guard" and "levies." Units no longer defend local territorial units—*thematic* troops under a *strategos*—and therefore the designation *thematic* is, in this context, archaic. Although Manuel recreated several *themata* to bolster the defense of western Asia Minor, there is no evidence that he sought to duplicate complex defensive system of the Macedonian emperors. Certain units were kept under arms in all seasons, for example the Varangians. Other men accompanying the emperor were the *hetaireia* (companions) at Semlin, or the "cavalry squadrons" that accompanied Manuel on his raid into Serbia in 1168. These men differed from the German, Flemish, or Italian mercenary troops that appear in descriptions of special missions. Such troops cannot be considered *tagmatic* whether or not they possessed an elite status within the army. This special status stemmed from their function as extra-heavy shock troops, or from their service as special mission detachments. They were organized ethnically, and fought in their own units, but this does not imply the sort of regularized organization, training, and equipment that is characteristic of *tagmatic* units of the ninth and tenth centuries. Similarly, there were no *thematic* units in the army. Troops levied from Thrace and Macedonia, and occasionally from Thessaly and Paphlagonia, were called up by the emperor without reference to local military officials. The western provinces never had the sort of hyper-organized defensive system relying on independent *strategoi*, as the eastern provinces once possessed. Major threats to the empire usually came from the east, and the geography of the west did not favor small, highly organized defensive units. Furthermore, the recruits drawn from outside the Aegean littoral—the Serbs, Vlachs, and Bulgarians—were not as loyal to the emperor as had been the soldiers of Asia Minor. Bulgarian soldiers appear once in the Alexiad, and they also appear in a list of troops from the Komnenian period. They are never described during a battle.⁴⁰ Alexios reluctantly used Vlachs and

guard units under his personal control, available for campaign on short notice, so that he could surprise a foe that normally would have been able to anticipate a Byzantine attack by monitoring the emperor's military preparations.

⁴⁰ Anne Comnène, *Alexiade*, ed. B. Leih (Paris, 1937–76), II, 135. F. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi*, 6 vols. (Vienna, 1860–90), VI, 173–7. The latter is a chrysobull of Alexios I, which exempts the Monastery of St. Chelidion on Patmos from billeting of Roman and allied soldiers. Bulgarians,

Manicheans.⁴¹ Serbia was never under the empire's control long enough to permit the regular use of Serbian troops. Nor did the mountains of Epiros, far from population and governmental centers, supply any recruits.

With the dissolution of the *tagmata* and *themata* under the Komnenoi, soldiers were no longer drawn from the defunct *themes* of Asia Minor. With the collapse of the Asia Minor *theme* system, the territories of Europe provided almost all of the empire's native manpower. These units were tied to geographical regions, but there is no evidence of a local, *thematic* bureaucratic administration equivalent to the administration of Asia Minor under the Macedonian emperors. The only units that appear to have been *tagmatic*, in the sense that they were constantly maintained guard units, were the Varangians. Sources are silent as to how many retainers the noble associates of Manuel and John maintained, so it is impossible to determine whether they were organized as units, or were a few picked men who surrounded their patron when he went on campaign. It is also impossible to determine the military effectiveness of such troops. Can we suppose that these men were prototypes of the *Gefolgeschaften* (units of personal retainers) of the Palaiologian period? There is too little evidence in Komnenian sources to jump to this conclusion. Nor should one read too much into Kinnamos' references to "organization" in his description of Byzantine formations at Semlin (1167).⁴² This word appears to imply that a large number of men were "organized", or as Brand translates it, "arrayed" with the emperor, but we cannot be certain. Nor can we determine whether these men were identical with "immortals", or the "archontopouloi," or

as well as Rus, Varangians, Koulpingoi [unknown], Inglinoi [English], Frangoi [Franks], Nemitsoi [Germans], Saracens, Alans [Turkic mercenaries], Abasgoi [mercenaries from the Black Sea coastlands], and the Immortals, are prohibited from using the properties of the monastery.

⁴¹ The term "Manicheans" was used by the Byzantines to refer to most dualistic sects. In this instance, the Manicheans were the Bogomils, or the Paulicians who had settlements near Philippopolis, in Thrace. Alexios, who burned their leader Basil, persecuted the Bogomils. The *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* states that unlike the Paulicians, the Bogomils were not war-like. If we accept this contention, then the war-like "Manicheans" recruited by Alexios therefore probably refer to the Paulicians, who likewise had settlements in Thrace.

⁴² Kinnamos, 271. This refers to the battle of Semlin, where the troops normally under the personal command of the emperor were under the command of Andronikos Kontostephanos.

merely the emperor's personal followers because Kinnamos does not provide a detailed description of their composition.

Byzantine troops and Latin mercenaries both appeared in the main battle-lines of Byzantine armies. From the beginning of Alexios' reign, western mercenaries were used for special missions. This was due to the disorganization of the imperial army, rather than to any qualitative difference between Byzantine and western European troops. During John and Manuel's reigns, Byzantine troops were levied in Paphlagonia, along the Maiander River, in Macedonia, Thrace, and in Hellas. By John's reign, the islands again provided revenue and maintained anti-piracy squadrons. In short, Byzantine military units had been reconstituted and again provided the bulk of the military forces described in our sources' tactical descriptions.

Myriocephalon

The most important campaign of Manuel's reign was also the last time Manuel was in command of a major field army. This was the 1176 attack upon Ikonion, ruled by the Seljuk sultan Kilij Arslan II. Kilij Arslan, who deposed and murdered his brother Mas'ud, was a more forceful ruler than his brother had been. Mas'ud had tried to restrain the Turkoman tribesmen who were theoretically under his control, from attacking Byzantine territory. Although this peace was broken by occasional periods of open warfare and much raiding, the frontier with Ikonion remained static between Manuel's unsuccessful 1146 campaign and the 1160s. On becoming sultan, Kilij Arslan initiated negotiations with the German emperor Frederick I Barbarossa. This move coincided with Manuel's failure to obtain a favorable diplomatic position in northern Italy, where the decimation of Frederick's army meant that Byzantine influence was no longer needed or welcome.⁴³ Manuel also failed to conquer southern Italy or to cement an alliance with the new Norman ruler William

⁴³ The battle of Legano, in which largely infantry army of the Lombard League of northern Italy utterly defeated Frederick's army, shattered his hopes of controlling that region. It also meant that the League's alliance with Manuel against Frederick was no longer necessary. For a full analysis of the battle see: Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War, Volume III: Medieval Warfare* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1990), 342-43.

II. William instead formed an alliance with the old Norman enemy, the German emperor. Furthermore, Manuel could not assert Byzantine claims upon Antioch without completely alienating his remaining support and influence in the west, and with King Amalric of Jerusalem. Finally, Manuel's attack upon Damietta was both a failure and an indication of the limits of Byzantine influence with the Latin states in the east.⁴⁴ In 1171 Manuel seized Venetian property and imprisoned some Venetian citizens, alienating the one state that was absolutely necessary to Byzantium's western policy and which had strategic interests that complemented Byzantine interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Manuel's solution to the collapse of decades of Byzantine foreign policy was to prepare an expedition that would not require sea power and that would attack an enemy who was incapable of receiving aid from western allies.

This campaign differed from other campaigns that Manuel had planned. First, the emperor personally led this expedition. The last large campaign in which the emperor had participated was against Hungary and Serbia in 1157. In 1165 he conducted a siege at Zeugmion, but the crucial battle was fought at Semlin. There the Byzantine army was under the capable command of Andronikos Kontostephanos. Manuel had not led an expedition against the Seljuks since 1146, thirty years before. Nevertheless, his preparations for the 1176 campaign were adequate and careful. First, he rebuilt Dorylaion, an old Byzantine fortification on the edge of the central Asia Minor plateau, to serve as an advanced base and supply point. Next, he re-fortified Soublaion, another advanced base on the Byzantine-Seljuk border. These two sites were located on the natural campaign routes toward Ikonion. By fortifying both, Manuel gave himself two bases through which he could gain information about the Seljuks and from which he could launch his campaign. Kinnamos gives little information about this campaign except that Rhyndakos was the mustering place for Manuel's army, and that the Hungarian and Serbian allies were late in arriving. This meant that the army had to campaign in the summer, rather than in the spring.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Kinnamos, 278-80. Choniates, *Historia*, 161-68. The siege failed largely because of lackluster support from King Amalric, who did not relish trading a relatively weak enemy (Egypt) for a Byzantine overlordship supported by the tremendous fleet that Manuel had sent to aid the expedition.

⁴⁵ Kinnamos, 299-300. Kinnamos also notes that the Byzantine army foundered

Choniates, writing well after the expedition, under the Angeloi dynasty, provides us with a wealth of disparate detail. His account of Manuel's preparations includes the observation that the emperor mustered the "existing forces" and supplemented these with recruits, as well as with the usual Latin and Cuman mercenaries.⁴⁶ Kinnamos tells us that the Hungarian and Serb allies also participated. The purpose of the expedition was nothing less than the destruction of the Seljuk state through the capture of the capital, Ikonion. Is Choniates exaggerating? No previous Byzantine emperor had attempted to destroy the Seljuk state. The capture of Nicaea (the first Seljuk capital) during the First Crusade showed that this might not be accomplished by seizing the Seljuk capital. Nevertheless, both Kinnamos and Choniates identify the taking of Ikonion as the goal of the campaign. Manuel's investment in the venture was considerable: in a letter to Henry II of England, Manuel recounts that his siege train was ten miles long,⁴⁷ and size of the army may have contributed at the outset to its defeat by making sufficient water and provisions difficult to obtain. The Turkish plan of destroying the forage and watering places necessary for provisioning the Byzantine army worked, and exacerbated the supply problem. But Manuel's army was in difficult straits before it even reached the passes of Myriokephalon. Dysentery was rampant and the soldiers were exhausted.⁴⁸ Manuel's strategy was to prepare the advanced bases of Dorylaion and Soublaion, then to use them to strike as quickly as possible at Ikonion. This precipitous advance was also necessary because the campaign began later in the summer than the emperor expected. This exacerbated supply problems.

The battle of Myriokephalon began when the Sultan's men occupied the rough ground of the Tzivritze defiles. According to Choniates, the army needed to press through these passes after leaving

because the timing of the campaign was wrong, and the emperor was forced to campaign in the summer.

⁴⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 178.

⁴⁷ Michael F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300-1450*. (Cambridge, 1985), 146. Hendy has written the best description of the Myriokephalon campaign, including the difficulties of placing the exact geographic location of the battle. Hendy's source for the siege train of Manuel is Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, ed. W. Stubbs, 4 vols. (London, 1868-71), II, 103.

⁴⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 179. Choniates says that the Turks also skirmished with the Byzantines and destroyed the grass so that the Byzantine horses were unable to graze.

the ruined fort of Myriokephalon.⁴⁹ The Byzantine battle order through the pass was as follows: The vanguard was led by John and Andronikos Angelos, Constantine Makrodukas commanding the eastern divisions,⁵⁰ and Andronikos Lepardas, who was one of the sub-commanders at Semlin. Each commander also brought his own retainers. Following the vanguard came the main body of the army. Baldwin of Antioch, the brother-in-law of Manuel, commanded the right wing of this formation, composed of his Latin troops. Theodore Maurozomes commanded the left wing. Next came the baggage, followed by the emperor with his picked men. Andronikos Kontostephanos, who had commanded the Byzantine army at Semlin, commanded the rear guard.

One of the notable elements of Choniates' description of this battle is his assessment of Manuel's recklessness. Choniates reports that Manuel took no scouting precautions, that he did not adjust the loads of the pack animals for rough terrain, that he did not put aside the wagons with the siege engines until the tactical action was over, and, most of all, that the emperor did not attempt to use his light troops to drive the Turks from their superior position in the passes before he sent in his army. Manuel's trepidation was understandable. His army was ravaged by dysentery. It was exhausted, and its horses weakened by a lack of water and forage. The emperor wanted to break through the passes and reach the plains of Ikonion as quickly as possible. The Turks, led by the Seljuk sultan, were massed at the end of the pass. Archers covered the hillsides on either side of the pass.

Manuel first sent his vanguard ahead, and these troops dislodged the defending Turks. The main body of the Byzantine army, rather than stay and fight with the vanguard, which apparently was on the slopes holding off the Turks, tried to push through in open ranks, and not in battle order. Choniates opines that this section of the army should have used its archers to hold off the Turks, and closed ranks to fight them off along with the soldiers of the van. It is hard to disagree with Choniates' analysis. Instead, the Turks fell back from the Byzantine vanguard, which pushed through the pass. The Turks then returned in greater numbers, and attacked the disorganized

⁴⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 179.

⁵⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 189.

troops of the right wing (Baldwin of Antioch's wing). This division was quickly routed and destroyed, and Baldwin was killed.

The rest of the army had also followed the vanguard and central body of the army into the pass. Choniates reports that the wagons were massed together in the center of the pass; the Byzantine cavalry could neither move forward nor retreat because of them. Kilij Arslan II then sent a unit of Turks around to the Byzantine rear and blocked any retreat in that direction. Meanwhile, in front of the main body of the army, the vanguard had broken through the pass and found a hill, where it made an entrenched bivouac. Manuel, surrounded and in danger of capture, charged the Turks with his guard units and broke out of the encirclement. Meanwhile, the Turkish lancers and archers decimated the rest of the emperor's army.

The Byzantines, contrary to their usual performance, suffered from confusion of command during this stage of the battle. This was exacerbated by a sandstorm that covered both armies during the later stage of the battle. The result of this debacle was that the imperial baggage train (which included the money Manuel had levied for the campaign as well as the siege engines and supplies) was overrun and captured by the Turks. According to Choniates, hardly an impartial source when examining Komnenian failings, Manuel was ready to flee. Saner heads convinced him to remain with his soldiers and set up another entrenched camp. Later that evening Andronikos Kontostephanos appeared, as well as others who had escaped from battle largely unscathed.⁵¹

We have examined why Manuel made so many mistakes: he pressed through the pass because the Turks made his route of march so unbearable that the importance of finding forage and water for his horses and men exceeded all other considerations. The second question, why imperial communication and command control was so poor has been partially answered: a sandstorm obscured the battlefield, making it difficult to differentiate friend from foe. This would have favored the Turks. The Byzantines, unfamiliar with the territory in which they traveled, needed to maintain a higher degree of

⁵¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 186, ll. 79–81. Choniates says, “ὅψε δὲ καὶ ὁ Κοντοστέφανος Ἀνδρόνικος ἀβλαβῆς παρῆν, ὃς ὀπισθοφυλάκει, καὶ ἕτεροι τῶν δυναμένων μέγα παρὰ τῷ Μανουὴλ ἀπλήγεις συνδεδραμήκασιν.” “Late in the day, Andronikos Kontostephanos, who commanded the rear guard, appeared unharmed, and many of the other forces which were largely unscathed rushed to meet Manuel.” Transl. Magoulias, 105.

discipline than was possible under the conditions they faced. This suggests a third problem, one of army control. Baldwin's Antiochene allies appear to have fought poorly, although blaming the defeat on the army's “foreign” contingent may be a reflection of Choniates' bias against foreign soldiers. It is also apparent the central formations of the Byzantine army advanced into the pass in open order. In other words, they were not in military formation and were thus unprepared for an attack. The Byzantine vanguard had driven off only the advance elements of the Turkish army, and it pressed through without waiting for the rest of the emperor's troops. When this unwieldy mass of troops became trapped in the center of the pass the Turks surrounded it and routed it by repeated attacks. As was typical in pre-modern battles, this phase of rout and pursuit was when the real slaughter occurred. Choniates reports that half of the Byzantine army fell, and that most of the emperor's important kin died.⁵² What Choniates probably means is half of those involved were put out of action, since the van had pressed through the pass before the defeat, and the rear-guard did not have a significant role in the battle. Furthermore, many of the men who joined the emperor later that evening were described as “unscathed.”

Myriokephalon resulted in a treaty between Manuel and Kilij Arslan II that specified that Manuel would destroy the new fortifications at Soublaion and Dorylaion. When the emperor left Dorylaion intact, the Turks raided to the Aegean coast, sacking Tralles, Antioch-in-Psidia, Louma and Pentacheir. An army under John Vatatzes in turn defeated this group of 24,000 Turks. So, although Manuel regarded his defeat as a second Manzikert, we should question whether it seriously affected the Komnenian strategic position in Asia Minor.⁵³ Certainly the Turkish attempt to capitalize on Manuel's defeat ended in disaster.

Aside from the difficulties of forage and resupply, several tactical problems arose for the Byzantine army at Myriokephalon? Manuel

⁵² Choniates, *Historia*, 184.

⁵³ Regarding Manzikert, see: Claude Cahen, “La Campagne de Mantzikert d'après les sources musulmanes,” in *Byzantion* (1934), 621–23. See also: Psellos, II, 159–62, and Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1953), 159–63. The battle of Manzikert (1071) was truly a disaster, and the Turks flooded the Anatolian peninsula in its aftermath. No such collapse occurred after Myriokephalon (1076), even though the Turks attempted to take advantage of the defeat to destroy the Byzantine position in Western Asia Minor.

faced an entrenched enemy, which had seized the heights along his route of march, and he placed his baggage in the pass itself, blocking any advance. Manuel's response, sending in his vanguard to clear the pass, demonstrates two things. First of all, the vanguard was composed of more than heavy cavalry; it surely included troops of all types: archers, *peltasts*, and heavier infantry. Baldwin's division, which Choniates criticizes for not fighting with the vanguard, was also criticized for not employing its "archers," evidence that the Latin division was also composed of a variety of troop types. When we examine this battle we should envision five or six small armies (the vanguard, right and left flank units, the emperor's troops, the rear guard) each with a balanced composition of light troops, cavalry and infantry. Indeed, the reason that the Byzantine army was not destroyed at Myriokephalon was because each of these smaller armies was self-sufficient, like a modern army corps. The vanguard and the imperial corps each created a fortified camp, and stragglers poured in from those units that had been broken. Therefore, Manuel's initial decision was the correct one. Had he focused on defeating the Turks in the pass, rather than on getting his army through, he might not have had his army mangled.

Manuel's decision to press through the pass without consideration of the Turks stationed there indicates the second problem the Byzantines faced in this battle: communication between their separate battle groups. Historians frequently over-estimate the ability of pre-modern tactical units to communicate and coordinate their actions in battle. Once action commenced, there was little that any commander could do other than determine when to charge with the units he held in reserve. At Myriokephalon, Manuel did not know that the entire Turkish army was at the pass, waiting to ambush his men. Manuel's failure to scout the pass was the major reason for the Byzantine defeat. The Byzantine army, including its allies, numbered approximately thirty-five thousand men; the pass was narrow, and the army stretched a long distance through it. The emperor's division was near the rear of the formation behind the baggage, making it exceedingly difficult for him to obtain current information in the position he occupied. Furthermore, regardless of the intelligence he obtained, the pass was so narrow that it proved impossible to give effective orders. He could neither retreat, nor move soldiers forward through the baggage train to help his beleaguered flank units.

What does this tell us about the Byzantine army under Manuel? Manuel's army was an experienced force, composed of both Byzantine and foreign troops. It was capable of defeating such varied foes as Hungarians, Normans, Germans, and Serbs. At Myriokephalon, the army performed remarkably well considering the mistakes Manuel made. Manuel's errors allowed the Turks to surround the Byzantines; the Seljuk army had better knowledge of the surrounding countryside, was better supplied, with fresher troops, and held the high ground around the Byzantine forces. Despite these terrible disadvantages, the only division to break and flee was the allied contingent from Antioch. This should not have led to the collapse of the entire army. By placing the baggage train between the front elements and main body of the army Manuel placed a wall between the two halves of his army. He could not ride to the rescue of the forward elements of the army, and the forward elements could not retreat to the safety of Manuel's contingent.⁵⁴ The Byzantine army was defeated piece by piece despite each element's close proximity to the other. The Byzantine soldiers apparently fought ferociously; they were defeated not because of any qualitative inferiority, or because they performed poorly in battle, or even because they were unsuited to campaigning in Asia Minor. This defeat was entirely attributable to Manuel's poor decisions. Choniates indicates that Manuel ignored the advice of his older, more experienced commanders. We should also not discount the emperor's continued belief in astrology, although Choniates does not indicate that it played a role in this particular battle.

It is instructive to compare the performance of Manuel's army at Myriokephalon with the army of Romanos IV at Manzikert, both because Manuel saw parallels in the outcome of the battle, and because these parallels were so unwarranted. This comparison between Manzikert and his defeat at Myriokephalon was based on emotional factors. Choniates recounts that during the battle Manuel was tempted to flee and leave his army.⁵⁵ He mentions that Manuel, when his army was mauled, sat stunned beneath a pear tree, with his helmet askew, until a common soldier appeared to help him.⁵⁶ These are

⁵⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 181.

⁵⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 187.

⁵⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 184.

the actions of a man panicked, stunned, and incapable of rational action. It is in this light that we should see Manuel's characterization of Myriokephalon as a second Manzikert. At Manzikert, Romanos IV had a poorly trained army filled with unreliable Norman mercenaries, Armenian levies, and Uze Turks who deserted to the enemy. Andronikos Doukas, commander of the reserve, treacherously betrayed the emperor at a critical moment. Romanos' army panicked. At Myriokephalon, Manuel possessed a seasoned force that had been repeatedly victorious. It was filled with men the emperor could rely upon. This included both individual soldiers and Manuel's experienced sub-commanders. There were no desertions. Unlike Manzikert, Manuel's army was organized into self-sufficient military units. The imperial units at Myriokephalon fought well. The battle resulted in no wholesale collapse of a frontier. Although defeated, the Byzantine army was not destroyed, but appears within a year inflicting a defeat upon a force of "picked Turks."⁵⁷

Our analysis of the Komnenian tactical system will conclude with the battle on the Maiander River that Vatatzes fought against the elite troops of the Atabeg. The army that Vatatzes took with him was composed of "forces provided by the emperor together with those they collected along the way,"⁵⁸ probably the "eastern divisions" that Choniates mentions at Myriokephalon and later in Manuel's last campaign against the Turks.⁵⁹ Vatatzes prepared an ambush at a bridge on the Maiander River. Half his force was positioned on the far side of the bridge; the other half in the hills around the road the Turks would have to travel. The Turks, laden with booty, moved toward the bridge and were pelted by missiles from above. The Atabeg attempted to break out of the trap with his heavy armed cavalry, but the Turkish force was strung out on both sides of the river, and the Byzantines simultaneously attacked both halves of his army. After a brief, intense struggle, the Atabeg fled with his personal troops and tried to cross the river up-stream. Choniates mentions that one of the Byzantine's Alan allies killed the Atabeg with a two-edged sword. Like other Byzantine battles against the Turks,

⁵⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 193 ff.

⁵⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 193, Transl. Magoulias, 109.

⁵⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 195. This campaign was just one of a number of aggressive measures Manuel took after Myriokephalon, which together should dispel the notion that Byzantine defenses collapsed after the battle.

the Byzantine force displays both tactical flexibility and diversity. The Byzantines consisted of both lightly-armed missile men and heavy cavalry that could stand up to the heaviest Turkish cavalry. Also present were the ubiquitous allies, in this case Alans, who provided light cavalry and scouting capabilities for the Byzantine army of the Komnenoi.

The Komnenian Emperors as Generals

What conclusions can be drawn from an examination of the tactical actions in Alexios, John and Manuel's reigns? We would like to be able to analyze each emperor's development as a general. Second, we would like to know what changes in Byzantine tactical doctrine were enacted in each reign, including the causes of these changes. Third, we should like to determine whether a consistent tactical doctrine developed. We have examined the question of tactics, and Alexios and John's generalship. Examining Manuel's capability as a general is more complex. The great victory of Manuel's reign, Semlin, was fought under the direction of another commander, Andronikos Kontostephanos. Most of the campaigns in which Manuel participated were well fought, but our information provides surprisingly little information about his ability as a commander. We see his strategic failures in both of his Ikonion campaigns, where he underestimated the difficulties of mounting a major campaign against a militarily sophisticated foe. Manuel's strategic opportunity, at Myriokephalon, was a failure because of the emperor's personal failings and poor tactical decision-making. He failed to communicate adequately with his vanguard, sent the unwieldy wagons in front of the main body of the army in a narrow pass, and attempted to flee the disaster. Choniates' account implies that it had been impossible to see what was happening, whether a victory or a defeat was in the making. Manuel's personal qualities as a soldier are in doubt only during this battle. In Hungary, in numerous skirmishes against the Turks, during his own and in his father's reign, Manuel repeatedly demonstrated his bravery. Of course, Manuel was nearly sixty years old at the time of Myriokephalon, and not in his prime. Whatever the reason, our sources do not present Manuel as an impressive general. It is instructive that Choniates says that Manuel ignored the advice of his older, wiser commanders and relied upon the opinions of impetuous youths,

related to him by blood, when he chose to fight at Myriokephalon.⁶⁰ These older, wiser heads were probably the commanders who won the emperor's previous battles for him: Andronikos Kontostephanos, Theodore Mavrozomes, and Andronikos Lapardas. Our evidence indicates that as a general, Manuel was usually out of his depth, particularly at Myriokephalon. The last major campaign he conducted against the Turks had been in 1146, thirty years before.

Next, what were the changes in tactical doctrine that each reign experienced, and are we able to determine any broad changes that occurred between 1081 and 1180? We have examined Alexios' reign, and we have noted that gradually, as Alexios reconstituted the Byzantine army from the remnants left to him after Manzikert and the civil wars, the army developed the ability to fight both Turkish and western foes. This improvement was due in large part to Alexios' own tactical ability. Alexios was a mediocre general at the beginning of his reign, but his skill gradually developed. Whether this improvement should be attributed to his merits or to his reliance on better advice is irrelevant. By the end of his reign, the Byzantine army was a disciplined force, capable of great tactical flexibility. It was able to stand up to foes like the Normans, and to withstand the harassing attacks favored by the Turks. John's reign is more historically problematic. Choniates and Kinnamos present an emperor whose deeds occurred before they were adults. They describe him as they had heard of him: a competent and powerful ruler. It is difficult as a consequence to discern any development in his tactics from our sources because they treat his military expertise as fully developed at the beginning of his reign.

The most remarkable aspect of Komnenian campaigns is that each emperor's army faced so many different threats. Furthermore, each emperor campaigned with different purposes. Alexios remained on the defensive in Asia Minor until the end of his reign. The empire made territorial gains in Anatolia by occupying cities in the wake of the First Crusade. In the west, Alexios maintained the Byzantine frontier by defeating the Normans and the Pechenegs, but each of these foes campaigned against the emperor in clearly definable zones. The Normans easily occupied the coastlands of Epiros and north to Dyrrachion. They then attacked eastward through Epiros and into

⁶⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 179.

Thessaly, or northward past Ochrid toward Thessalonike. The Pechenegs and Cumans both used Bulgaria north of the Haimos Mountains as a base for their attacks. These raids ranged south into Thrace and ravaged territory from the suburbs of Constantinople out to Philippopolis. Hungary was not yet a threat to Byzantine power in the Balkans, while any display of imperial power was enough to cow the Serbians. Most of Alexios' campaigns in the west were defensive. The object was to preserve existing imperial territory, not to make new conquests.

John II faced the same situation in the west. He fought defensive campaigns against the Pechenegs (1122) and the Hungarians (1127). The Normans, engaged in internal struggles of their own, were unable to interfere with Byzantine control over the Ionian littoral. John's major military campaigns were in the east, where he had to contend with the growing power of the Danishmendids. He initiated several campaigns to control Kastamon and Gangra, all ultimately unsuccessful. He also conducted a campaign against both Trebizond (under separatist Greek rulers) and Neokaisareia. John's campaigns against the Danishmendids were frequently tactical successes but strategic failures. These regions remained in Turkish hands. John's other major campaign theater was Cilicia. He spent several years attempting to re-establish Byzantine control over the Euphrates borderlands, including Antioch. A prerequisite for this was control of Cilicia. Armenian separatists made this difficult, but nearly seven years of campaigning resulted in nominal imperial control of Cilicia and titular sovereignty over Antioch. John's most notable expedition, against Aleppo and Edessa, failed to take either of these major centers.

Manuel's campaigns are difficult to divide into clear stages. He fought aggressive and defensive wars in both east and west. Appropriately enough, Manuel began his reign with the army, in Cilicia, where John had just died. Returning to Constantinople, he immediately planned an expedition against Ikonion, capital of the Seljuk sultanate. After this campaign failed, he managed the passage of the Second Crusade through his domains. In the wake of the German and French pilgrims came the Normans, who conquered Kerkyra, necessitating a campaign in the west. From 1151 to 1158, the Byzantine army fought sporadic Norman wars. These culminated in the campaigns of 1155-57, when Byzantine troops crossed the Adriatic Sea and conquered Apulia before being defeated. Manuel did not

participate personally in the Italian campaigns, but he conducted the siege at Kerkyra. While Byzantine armies were busy in Italy, the emperor fought the Cumans and the Hungarians (1151–2) in the Balkans. Following these actions Manuel, like his father, turned east (1158–59), and attempted to subdue Cilicia and Antioch. These eastern expeditions provoked the Seljuks under Kilij Arslan, who harassed the empire's Anatolian borderlands (1162–77).

Manuel's Hungarian wars (from 1162) culminated in the Byzantine victory at Semlin (1167). During this time the situation in the east unraveled. Thoros, an Armenian prince, rebelled in Cilicia and defeated the expeditions sent against him (1165). Manuel tried to strengthen the Byzantine position by fortifying the Byzantine cities of western Asia Minor: Pergamon, and Atramyttion, and building Neokastra. By 1176, thirty years of constant campaigning had accomplished little. The emperor's final campaign against Ikonion ended with a Turkish victory at Myriokephalon (1176). While this defeat was not so catastrophic as has sometimes been claimed, it meant that in both east and west Byzantine arms had been thwarted, and while the army remained professional and proficient, the use that Manuel made of it had not extended Byzantine territory beyond the boundaries set by his father.

To characterize the military careers of the three emperors: Alexios faced a critical situation where he was forced to continually campaign. John carefully chose his wars. There were no Crusades, and few sudden invasions. Few surprises distracted him from his campaigns. Nevertheless, his campaigns gained little territory for the empire. They ensured, however, that the empire was on the offensive, rather than continually defending its core territories. Manuel pursued an ambitious foreign policy that provided numerous opportunities for his foes to distract him during his campaigns, relying upon subordinate generals to lead most of his armies. The complicated campaign history of Manuel's reign is not just a function of source selectivity. Manuel created a more complex situation for himself diplomatically (for example, by attacking the Venetians), and in addition, the Normans, Germans, French, Hungarians and Turks were all more sophisticated opponents than they had been during John and Alexios' reigns.

CHAPTER SIX

SUPPORTING THE KOMNENIAN ARMY

We have examined the literary sources for the Komnenian army, its history in battle and how Komnenian tactical doctrine developed over time. Our next question will be: how was the army maintained? Few other issues in Byzantine history have sparked more debate. Were soldiers paid in coin or were they only given land? Did villagers have communal responsibility for providing soldiers for the government? If so, what happened to the soldier class in the eleventh century? Why was it not available for the Komnenian emperors and their immediate predecessors? In this chapter we will examine these questions as they relate to the Komnenian period, concentrating on the recruiting policies and methods of fiscal support for the Komnenian soldiery.

At the end of the eleventh century, Alexios had difficulty raising a sufficient military force to resist the Norman and Pecheneg invasions. By 1118, he was able to call up a large, competent army to attack the Seljuk sultanate. His son, John II, seems to have had no difficulty in raising an army. William of Tyre repeatedly describes the powerful hosts mustered by John and his son Manuel when they campaigned in Syria.¹ In John's reign, and certainly under Manuel I, Byzantine armies were equal in number to their Hungarian opponents, and Byzantine forces were large enough to defeat the German Conrad III's crusading army outside of Constantinople.

The Komnenian emperors never developed a single source of manpower; they employed both mercenaries and native soldiers. Nor did they have a single, consistent method of supporting their armies.²

¹ Guillaume de Tyre, *Chronique*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens (Turnholt, 1986), bk. 14, chap. 24, pp. 662–63 (John Komnenos), bk. 17, chap. 16, pp. 781–85, and bk. 18, chap. 23, pp. 844–45 (Manuel Komnenos), trans. E.A. Babcock and A.C. Krey *William, Archbishop of Tyre: A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea* (New York, 1943), II, 83 (for John Komnenos), II, 208, 275 (for Manuel Komnenos.)

² This presents historians with methodological problems. It is natural to expect system from what we see as a vital activity: obtaining trained, well-supplied recruits. However, the Komnenian emperors undertook these activities in a more ad hoc manner than had their Macedonian predecessors.

We will trace the Komnenian system of maintenance from its beginnings under Alexios to its eventual form under Manuel. First we will explore the troops employed in each reign, the numerical evidence for the prevalence of particular types of troops—infantry, cavalry, light troops and heavy, mercenaries and foreign settlers—as well as the development of guard units. *Pronoia*, the *stratiotika ktemata*, and imperial taxation will then be investigated. How important were they in each reign? In conjunction with this, we will briefly discuss the settlement of Cumans, Pechenegs, and Serbs within the empire. We will also study military land holding under the Komnenoi. Finally, we will examine whether the Komnenian system of maintaining soldiers was successful.

The Composition of the Komnenian Army: Literary Sources

The Komnenoi relied upon both native soldiery for the core of their army, but they also employed a wide variety of auxiliary soldiers. Allies, including Hungarians, Serbians, and Antiochenes formed occasional units in the Komnenian army, but they were not reliable soldiers. Mercenaries were always available—from England, France, Germany and Italy, including the Norman kingdom in the south. Native soldiery fought in every major army fielded by the Komnenian emperors. Colonies of defeated peoples, including Serbian and Pecheneg settlers, provided useful auxiliaries. Our literary sources seldom provide more than this information. Orations and court poetry can provide useful corroborative detail, and sometimes mention places that are absent from our historical sources, but orations seldom provide substantive information with respect to recruitment and financing. The *Actes de Lavra* offers useful fragments of information on grants of fiscal revenues, as well as prohibitions against troops usurping lands owned by the Great Lavra monastery.³ Ioannes Zonaras offers a few remarks that Alexios lavished lands and financial favors on his family.⁴ Alexios' tax reform of 1106, as well as his coinage

³ Paul Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium: From the Origins to the Twelfth Century* (Galway, 1979), 225; G. Rouillard and P. Collomp, *Actes de Lavra* I, (Paris, 1937), no. 56, ll. 91–92.

⁴ John Zonaras, *Epitomae Historiarum*, ed. M. Pinder and Th. Buttner-Wobst, 3 vols., CSHB (Bonn, 1841–97), 766–67.

reform of 1092 doubtless had an important impact upon the living conditions of soldiers as well as the peasants whom Theophylact of Ochrid describes as eking out a living on the lands of the church of Ochrid.⁵ But our sources provide little direct evidence to support this. Theophylact's purpose was to describe the difficult economic circumstances of his peasants, not to examine the privileges and responsibilities of the Cumans living in the nearby *theme* of Moglena. John Kinnamos does not discuss fiscal measures in any great depth. Niketas Choniates provides some detail in his diatribes against Manuel's fiscal policy. Modern historians have made much of these passages in Choniates, but he provides little detail connecting his general criticisms with any particular measure relating to the army itself.⁶

Choniates is nonetheless the only literary source that directly treats fiscal and military maintenance policy under the Komnenoi. He describes Manuel's diversion of ship monies from the Cyclades fleet to the treasury, and Manuel's decision to sell positions on the imperial registers, complete with lands and *paroikoi*, to anyone with ready cash.⁷ Anna Komnene describes a fiscal crisis in the central government early in Alexios' reign: Alexios took the extreme measure of melting down liturgical vessels to make coins to pay the army. She also provides detail on recruitment and payment of soldiers.⁸ She is our only reliable source for tracing the development of the early Komnenian military-financial system. Kinnamos' accounts of battles and campaigns are frequently more detailed than those provided by Choniates, as befits the account of an imperial secretary who occasionally accompanied Manuel on campaign.⁹ Choniates,

⁵ Theophylact, ed. P. Gautier, *Theophylacte d'Achrida*, II, Lettres, CFHB, 16/2, ep. 96, (Thessalonike, 1986).

⁶ One exception to this is Choniates' criticism about the policy of land grants to individuals who volunteered for military service and paid a small fee. These "soldiers" were supposedly recruited without the customary examination for military fitness. But Choniates also implies that soldiers held considerable power over the inhabitants of the *pronoia* they held. This is not in keeping with other evidence about the institution of *pronoia* under the Komnenian emperors, and this information, as well as that relating to enrollment without examination, should be treated with caution.

⁷ Niketas Choniates, *Niketae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. Van Dieten, CFHB (Berlin, 1975), *Historia*, 209.

⁸ Alexios used the offer of recruitment as a ruse to lure the Manichean leaders to a place where they could be captured. Nevertheless, the incident offers detail on how men were recruited and registered.

⁹ Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, trans. Charles M. Brand (New York, 1976), 2–4.

who was both *harmostes* (governor) of Thrace and paymaster of the troops stationed there, and later grand logothete, concentrates less on campaigns and more on fiscal policy.¹⁰ Zonaras' account is of tertiary importance for financial information. He notes that Alexios enriched his followers, but such vague indications of disapproval provide no useful information on the actual measures taken to support soldiers. William of Tyre, writing in the late twelfth century, describes the campaigns of all three Komnenian emperors but provides little detail about the army's composition or about its maintenance. Aside from his decidedly nonspecific and uninformative commentary—the emperors gathered a countless array of cavalry and chariots, composed of Byzantines and men of the many tongues who served the emperor—there is little here to interest scholars of imperial administration and military structure.¹¹ Michael the Syrian also offers little detail about military structure and support. He is prone to citing large, round numbers when describing armies and gives us no information that would permit us to better understand how Komnenian armies were financed.¹²

Legal sources provide some scattered information about soldiers' lands. There is only one reference to *stratitika ktemata* (soldiers' holdings) in chrysobulls datable to the Komnenian period—an act of the *doux* of the *theme* of Mylasa-Melanoudion (in southwest Asia Minor), Basil Vatatzes. Paul Lemerle notes that *stratitika ktemata* here refers not to soldier's lands, but to lands held by a variety of institutions, including the members of the army.¹³ In other words, the concept

¹⁰ Harry J. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, 1984), xiii.

¹¹ Guillaume de Tyre, *Chronique*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens (Turnholt, 1986), bk. 14, chap. 24 (II, 662–63), 83. William does offer certain other information of military value. He notes that the Byzantines left their borderlands south of the Danube, and in Epiros, desolate as a deterrent to invasion. William's information as to the size of the army, however, is highly suspect. (He claims that Alexios, along with his army (composed of native troops and an implausible "forty thousand" additional Latin soldiers, camped at Philomelion en route to aid the crusaders at Antioch. See bk. 18, chap. 23 [II, 844–45]). William is most useful when offering details of the political maneuvering with respect to Antioch. He describes Prince Raymond of Antioch's lies to John II, as well as how the prince played games of chance while John II made war upon Raymond's enemies (bk. 6, chaps. 10–12 [I, 319–23]).

¹² *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, ed. J.B. Chabot, vol. 3 (Paris, 1905), 371, Michael mentions armies of 50,000 Turks and (p. 275) 900,000 Germans and 500,000 French.

¹³ F. Miklosich and J. Müller, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi*, 6 vols., (Vienna, 1860–90), vol. IV, 319. P. Lemerle, "Recherches sur le régime agraire à Byzance:

of 'soldier's lands' as distinct from other kinds of holdings was not referred to. Soldiers happened to be among a variety of holders of *stratitika ktemata*. Other chrysobulls from the Komnenian period mention exemption from the *strateia* (military tax), but this formula for exemptions dates back to at least the 1070s, when it appears in the chrysobull granted by the emperor Michael VII to Michael Attaleiates.¹⁴ We cannot know whether the Komnenian exemption from various forms of taxation—*synone*, *kapnikon*, *strateia*, and *kastrokhsia*—has real significance, or whether it is merely a restatement of an outdated formula. Lemerle defines the *strateia* as "a fiscal tax of military character; in the plural, a group of taxes of this nature."¹⁵ But later in the same argument he also recognizes that in other Alexian chrysobulls the term *strateia* appears to be more general, a reference to a class of exemptions, perhaps without reference to the army itself.¹⁶ We now turn to the evidence for military support, beginning with the findings of modern historians.

The Secondary Literature

Economic models of the Byzantine economy offer only a partial explanation of how soldiers were maintained, especially during the Komnenian period, where hard fiscal data are few and far between.¹⁷ Mark Bartusis accepts that the Komnenoi possessed a mobile government that traveled with the emperor when he was on campaign, and he argues that war was a unifying force in Komnenian society, mollifying social discontent. However, he also argues that the Komnenian campaigns produced a "window of opportunity" for crushing

La Terre militaire à l'époque des Comnènes," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale X–XII siècles*, tome II, no. 3 (Poitiers, 1959), 265.

¹⁴ Miklosich and Müller, V, 137; *Regesten Der Kaiserurkunden des Ostromischen Reiches von 565–1453*, ed. Franz Dolger (Munich and Berlin, 1925), 2 Teil: Regesten von 1025–1204, pp. 19–20, no. 1005.

¹⁵ P. Lemerle, "Recherches sur le régime agraire à Byzance: La Terre militaire à l'époque des Comnènes," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale X–XII siècles*, tome II, no. 3 (Poitiers, 1959), 267.

¹⁶ Lemerle, *Recherches*, 265–78.

¹⁷ John Haldon, "The Army and the Economy: The Allocation and Redistribution of Surplus Wealth in the Byzantine State," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 72 (1992), 134–39, 145–49, reprinted in Haldon, *State, Army and Society in Byzantium: Approaches to Military, Social and Administrative History, Sixth to Twelfth Centuries* (Norfolk: Variorum, 1995), no. 6.

the Turks that the Komnenian emperors failed to exploit.¹⁸ This is an interesting argument that has basis in the rhetorical statements of our chroniclers, and because both Alexios and Manuel staged important campaigns against the Seljuks of Ikonion, (John attacked the Danishmendids, the more important threat in his day). Alexios' campaign of 1116-17 accomplished little. Manuel's campaigns of 1146 and 1176 were more ambitious; if we trust the claims of Kinnamos and Choniates, the goal of the 1176 campaign was to besiege and take Ikonion, thereby destroying the Seljuk state. Manuel's more serious advisors thought that such a campaign was an unrealistic boondoggle. The Byzantines were rarely able to bring the more mobile Seljuk army to battle, and the country they traveled through was unforgiving to large armies. Also, Manuel had not led a major campaign in Asia Minor in thirty years; his decision-making capabilities, as well as his tactical competence were questionable during this campaign. Nevertheless, had Manuel reached Ikonion with his siege engines intact, he might well have been able to storm the city.¹⁹

George Ostrogorsky identifies the granting of economic favors by the Komnenian emperors (especially John and Manuel), as the genesis of Byzantine feudalism. According to Ostrogorsky, *Pronoia* came to represent the equivalent of a western feudal allotment, and they weakened the Komnenian state (an argument that finds support in Zonaras). Walter Kaegi offers interesting collateral thoughts on the development of soldier's allotments, *stratitika ktemata* finding no evidence of these allotments prior to the tenth century.²⁰ The *De Thematis* of Constantine VII is silent on the issue, while the *Taktika* of Leo VI draws a sharp distinction between the roles of farmers and soldiers.²¹ It is possible to argue that "thematic soldiers" failed to prevent the Arab invasions of the seventh through ninth centuries; the evidence from Theophanes Continuatus, and their poor perfor-

¹⁸ Bartusis, Mark *The Late Byzantine Army* (Philadelphia, 1992), 349.

¹⁹ If we compare these two Ikonion campaigns (1146, 1176) with those of John II against the Danishmendids, what stands out is that John's campaigns had limited objectives—the taking of fortified centers on the Byzantine border—and yet the campaigns against Kinte and Neokaisareia still suffered from lack of supplies. John finally failed to hold these cities.

²⁰ Kaegi, "Some Reconsiderations on the Themes (Seventh-Ninth Centuries)," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* (Vienna, 1967), 39-53, esp. 51, for the origins of the *stratitika ktemata*.

²¹ Kaegi, "Some Reconsiderations on the Themes," 40-41.

mance during Theophilos' Amorion campaign supports this contention.²² However, this also means that the collapse of the *theme* system in the eleventh century cannot be blamed for the Turkish occupation of Anatolia.

Mark Whittow (taking a position close to that of Kaegi) finds an historical moral tale, grounded in Marxist theory, in the notion of the development of a free, land-holding peasantry. According to this theory, which he rejects, the tenth-century enslavement of the peasantry resulted in the Turkish invasions.²³ But the Turkish invasions had a character altogether different from the Arab invasions. Turkoman tribes sought land upon which to settle outside the control of any government. By contrast, even the largest Arab invasions, which occupied Byzantine soil for years, did not establish permanent settlements.

Kaegi and Whittow agree that historians have overvalued the military and economic value of the *stratitika ktemata*. A key text in this respect is the late tenth-century *Nomos Georgikos* (Farmer's Law), eighty-five articles that regulate relations between farmers and the state. The text claims a Justinianic ancestry, but titles are frequently the additions of later copyists and so its early origin cannot be trusted. Furthermore, the existence of a law, one section of which deals with soldiers' lands, does not prove that these were the main source of soldiers' support, or even that they were important to the support of soldiers. Whittow correctly argues that the fact of support in the form of lands does not mean that payment for services was non-existent. The *Ecloga* of Basil, which identifies a soldier's pay as his major source of maintenance, supports this.²⁴ Lemerle tacitly supports this theory with respect to the Komnenoi, stating that "[n]othing would

²² Theophanes Continuatus, CSHB 33, ed. B.G. Niebuhr (Bonn, 1838), 126-29, 113-14, 116-18. The levied soldiers of Theophilos were incompetent. Warren Treadgold (*The Byzantine Revival: 780-842*, Stanford, 1988) dates the reform of the Byzantine army, *theme*, and fiscal system to Theophilos' reign, so the argument that these troops were not adequate for the tasks that they faced could be countered by the claim that the new system was still in its infancy. Theophanes Continuatus claims that Theophilos was never the same after the campaign of Amorion, much like the claims of William of Tyre concerning Manuel. This may well be an accurate assessment, but it may also be a topos of military chronicling: the defeated leader becomes melancholy and changed. See also Treadgold, *Byzantine Revival*, 443 n. 410, for a discussion of the flawed chronology of the sources.

²³ Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025* (London, 1996), 113-15.

²⁴ Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 118.

lead us to believe that the granting of lands was a normal method of supporting and paying these men, Greek and foreign, until a late date in the Komnenian epoch."²⁵

We should be wary of positing a single 'Komnenian' system for maintaining the army. While standardized tactics, battle formations, and ways of using various nationalities and types of troops can be adduced from the evidence, the support of the army cannot be so simply categorized. Evidence from the chrysobulls of Alexios, John, and Manuel suggests a gradual increase in the importance of *pronoia*, owing nothing to Alexios' dispensing of favors to his supporters, and indeed of a completely different nature and class from such large-scale gifts. Unfortunately, we have few examples of actual grants of *pronoia*; most of our evidence is in the form of exemptions and protections from military exactions. At the very least, the documents prove that Komnenian soldiers were prone, to some degree, to abuse their privileges. For example, the Cumans appear in this evidence, but can we assume this means the Cumans formed more than an auxiliary branch of the Komnenian army? Chrysobulls that uphold exemptions against the depredations of particular military units, moreover, may be self-selected for special cases. (Auxiliaries seem to have been more prone to these abuses than were the majority of Byzantine soldiers.) Legal decisions often represent extraordinary abuses; generalizing from such evidence is also dangerous. If we treat the evidence from these exemptions and exceptional cases as typical of the larger reality, we run the risk of misunderstanding most methods of soldiers' support.

Paul Magdalino's reading of economic policy under the Komnenian emperors is in substantial agreement with Michael Angold's theses.²⁶ The smaller size and greater chronological scope of Angold's book means that it deals with these topics less thoroughly than does Magdalino's. Angold dissents from the theory that money supply was inelastic in pre-modern states.²⁷ Angold argues that high levels of trade, both along the Byzantine frontiers and with the western mer-

²⁵ Lemerle, *Recherches*, 271.

²⁶ Magdalino, Paul. *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge, 1993), see 140-171: Economy and Society. For a general survey of the period, see: Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204: A political history* (New York, 1984).

²⁷ Angold, 62-62. The static theory assumes that the amount of gold in a particular society did not vary, and that few facilities for credit existed.

chant republics, resulted in large infusions of specie into the imperial coffers.²⁸ As evidence he adduces larger numbers of trade fairs during the middle Byzantine period, such as the Euchaita and Thessalonike fairs, as well as the increased importance of the merchant republics in all of the contemporaneous sources. Credit—in a nineteenth- or twentieth-century conception of the term—did not exist and the coinage was debased only in the beginning of Alexios' reign. There is debate over whether Alexios followed his predecessors and continued to debase the coinage, or whether he maintained the currency at the debased levels of the coins of Michael VII and Nikeporos Botaniates.²⁹ Following his coinage reform of 1092, Komnenian coins remained constant in purity and value until the death of Manuel, by which point imperial expenditures had increased dramatically. The Komnenian emperors sponsored building projects, large amounts of land were turned over to the great monasteries as well as to the regime's supporters, and exemptions were offered to merchant republics that supported imperial policy. They maintained their coinage at constant purities despite expanded expenditures, larger armies, and frequent wars.³⁰ Since the emperors did not debase their currency, the Byzantine gold supply must have expanded during the twelfth century. There is thus no reason to believe that the Komnenian emperors (Alexios excluded) could not have paid their troops' bonuses in coin. Choniates even mentions that at Myriokephalon Manuel carried a treasury of money with the army, which the Turks seized when the Byzantines were defeated.³¹

²⁸ Angold, 248-49, 254, 259-61.

²⁹ Michael Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450* (Cambridge, 1985), 434 ff. Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), 223-28, for Alexios, 228 ff. for John II and Manuel I. The treaty of 1106, however, made well after the supposed coinage reform, mandates that payment to Bohemond be made in coins with the images of Romanos IV or Michael VII. Should this be taken to mean that the coins of these emperors were more pure than those of Alexios' reign? According to Grierson, Alexios' coinage reform resulted in coins purer than those from the period 1071-81. But these are precisely the coins to be paid. The only explanation in concord with Grierson's opinion would be that the coins being paid to the defeated Bohemond were intended to be debased coins, which would not be as valuable an asset to the Byzantine treasury.

³⁰ In addition to more frequent and proactive campaigning, John and Manuel engaged in an active and expensive program of fortification building. See Clive Foss and David Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications: An Introduction* (Pretoria, 1986), 56-59, 71-73, 145-50.

³¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 186.

Pronoia

As great lords (*dynatoi*) obtained lands and received the rents that had been paid to the state, the central government had greater difficulty obtaining these revenues. The tax system had therefore become regressive: those with the most money paid a smaller percentage of total tax receipts than those with little money.³² This argument underlies the contention that *pronoia* developed in response to a lack of gold reserves, as an alternative to uncollectable taxes. The sources, however, offer examples of the growth of a monetary economy, with plenty of land available for anyone who wished to cultivate it, and of an empire firmly in control of its finances—at least until late in the reign of Manuel.³³

With respect to the dominance of an elite among the ranks of Komnenian government, Jean-Claude Cheynet notes, "Alexios unified the aristocratic elite and transformed it into a vast family which held all the great posts, and received the benefits of rulership."³⁴ Choniates argued that Manuel instituted a reform of the army, and that Manuel relied upon western mercenaries for his troops. However, Cheynet argues against the development of a feudal structure under the Komnenoi. This is important to our discussion of the army because the placement of power in the hands of one's relatives (by Alexios, in particular) does not imply a change in the way soldiers were obtained. Yet precisely this assumption is apparent in the argument that the granting of *pronoia* is somehow connected to the way of government practiced by the Komnenoi.

The variety of opinion outlined above indicates that there remain serious questions among modern historians about the significance (and for some historians, the existence) of "soldier's land" as an ele-

³² Angold, 66.

³³ Choniates, *Historia*, 208–9. John of Poutze's reform was intended to gain currency by selling off an abundance of available land. Chrysobulls assume that certain taxes were still levied on the lands held by *pronoia* holders; the state, therefore, was not completely giving up its rights over the lands in question. See also: John Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London and New York, 1993), 130–31, 134–36. Angold, *Byzantine Empire*, 254, 260–61, 270 (citing Alexander Kazhdan's argument that Andronikos I was trying to re-establish a bureaucratic regime).

³⁴ Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Byzantina Sorbonensia, 9 (Paris, 1990), 413. Cheynet is largely in accord with Magdalino and Angold on this point.

ment in the army's support structure. We should see Basil II's legislative prohibition against seizing soldiers' holdings in the context of the rebellions of provincial magnates during his reign. Thus viewed, the legislation appears to have less to do with maintaining an effective army than with providing Basil a tool to use against any potential rival—trip-wire that gave Basil legal powers to confiscate the lands of any Anatolian magnate. Furthermore, the contention that there was no reform of the army under Alexios I, and that the military obligations of the soldiers were transformed into taxes under John II, has little source support.³⁵ The army Alexios I used against Bohemond was different in structure and manpower from the army of Romanos IV Diogenes.

One would expect that fiscal reform would have been one element of Alexios' reform of the army, but lack of evidence makes it difficult to determine what fiscal reforms (if any) Alexios put into effect. We do know that by the 1117 he had no difficulty obtaining trained veteran soldiers. Historians have made much of Niketas Choniates's remark that John of Poutze transformed the Aegean islanders' obligation to provide ships into a fiscal requirement (during the reign of Manuel I), postulating from that anecdote the commutation of military obligations to taxes.³⁶ But this is one example only, and one that relates to the navy, a service that the Komnenian emperors usually ignored. The sources do not provide evidence that this policy was also extended to the army.³⁷

Such questions are natural with respect to the army of the document-rich Palaiologan period: Did small holders' families work the land themselves? Did these properties receive fiscal exemptions (*exkouseia*)? How were *pronoia* assigned, and were they given to individual soldiers, communities of soldiers, foreigners or native Byzantines? Komnenian historical sources provide little insight into these matters.³⁸ Nonetheless, they do treat certain important questions. First,

³⁵ Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*, 5.

³⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 55; Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*, 5–6.

³⁷ Lemerle, *Recherches*, 276 and n. 60. Soldiers' colonies were important economic and social units (witness the evidence for the activities of the Cuman settlers in the Balkans), but there is too little evidence to claim that their services were paid entirely in land.

³⁸ The accuracy of reported data (and even the facts themselves in many cases), are well nigh impossible to ascertain. The literary sources do, however, permit us to analyze the relative importance of different types of soldiers and of the locations from which they were drawn.

our sources document the use of *pronoia* under the Komnenoi. Second, monastic donations provide some information about how troops were maintained, although this is usually in the form of exemptions from military exactions. Literary sources also offer extensive information about how the imperial army was supported. We know certain cities and regions (particularly Pelagonia in Macedonia, and Lopadion in western Asia Minor), were used as *aplekta*, and we can determine how supplies and provisions were collected there for the use of soldiers. Our sources also offer plenty of examples of the differences between the soldiers of the capital and the troops raised in the provinces. These historical data enable us to determine who served in the army, how large a siege train could be supported, and how many men it would contain on a campaign such as Manuel's second Ikonion venture (1176).³⁹

The economy of the Komnenian Empire has been extensively discussed in the secondary literature, and continues to be the subject of extensive inquiry; a short discussion of the place of the army within the Byzantine economy is, however, warranted.⁴⁰ The Byzantine economy was expanding under the Komnenian emperors, an expansion that did not result in proportional increases in state revenues, and that created administrative problems for Alexios, John, and Manuel. The Byzantine state levied land and poll taxes. Duties upon goods that amounted to a percentage of their value were quite rare. As a consequence, the Republic of Saint Mark received economic privileges from Alexios, John, and Manuel, and made huge profits transporting goods over Byzantine seas. Cargo values were increasing, as spices and precious items passed through the empire, but the revenues generated by these sales remained untapped by the

³⁹ Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Les effectifs dans l'armée Byzantine" in *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale, X-XII siècles*, Université de Poitiers, Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale 38: 4 (Poitiers, 1995), 319-35. This is a good general study of numbers in Byzantine armies.

⁴⁰ The most recent survey of Komnenian monetary and taxation reforms is that contained in Margaret Mullet and Dion Smythe, eds, *Alexios I Komnenos: I, Papers* (Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 4.1 (Belfast, 1996)). Of particular importance to a discussion of financial questions is Alan Harvey's essay in the volume: "Financial Crisis and the Rural Economy," 167-85. Military matters are examined by Mark Whittow in "How the East Was Lost: The Background to the Komnenian Reconquista," 55-68. The most important work on the Byzantine economy to date is Michael Hendy's *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300-1450* (Cambridge, 1985).

Byzantine government. The only kind of economic expansion that the state was prepared to tax was new land brought into cultivation, a less lucrative revenue source (and more difficult to obtain), than taxes on transit trade. Exemptions from taxation also increased under the Komnenoi, and these nullified the tax gains the might be expected from a rising population and an increase in the quantity of cultivated land.⁴¹

Furthermore, the constant military expeditions of all three emperors proved enormously expensive. Alexios produced coins from melted church implements in order to pay for his war against the Normans. Manuel spent 30,000 pounds of gold on the campaign in Italy. These forces, which consumed so much gold, were small bands of mercenaries supplemented by Iberian and Cuman troops shipped to Italy by the government. They seldom numbered more than a few thousand men, although they were in the field for several years. One can only imagine the expense of armies four to five times this size, mustered every year by John II, and which campaigned in all seasons. The expense of Manuel's army of 1176 must have been tremendous; it must have numbered nearly twenty five thousand Byzantine troops, with additional contingents from Hungary, Serbia, and Antioch.

When we examine such large funds, we should also keep in mind that monasteries or imperial family members controlled large swathes of land, and these lands paid little or no taxes. The tax placed upon the extensive lands of the Great Lavra monastery in 1107-08 was 32 7/24 *nomismata*. These lands consisted of some 47,052 *modioi*, approximately 4,500 hectares.⁴² Substantial estates were in the hands of great lords or monasteries, and were either not taxed, or were taxed at entirely nominal rates like those listed above. Thus, we should not assume that territory re-conquered by the Komnenoi added substantially to their economic potential, at least in forms that could be translated into tax revenues and military power.

Manuel's use of *pronoia* to support soldiers and to give them an interest in the equitable collection of taxes on their allotments

⁴¹ The evidence for increases in land under cultivation during the Komnenian period also includes indirect evidence: large bodies of troops drawn from new provinces, Paphlagonia, Neokastra, and Nicomedia.

⁴² Alan Harvey, "Financial Crisis and the Rural Economy," in *Alexios I Komnenos*, eds., Margaret Mullett and Dion Smythe (Belfast, 1996), 177, 181.

constituted economic reform on two levels. First, it placed the support of soldiers on a firm financial basis, one that did not require liquid funds. Second, it meant that soldiers, or groups of soldiers in the case of joint *pronoia*, were responsible only to the emperor for their support. The negative economic aspects of *pronoia* have been carefully analyzed, primarily relying upon comments by Zonaras and Choniates.⁴³ What has been overlooked is that the presence of soldiers who used funds from *pronoia* increased the chances that the land paid rent, at least for military purposes. The decrease in the importance of *strategoi* is a natural outcome of this. When the central government directly administered the support of soldiers stationed in the provinces, the *strategoi* were not as important. Their responsibility had been to control and maintain troop lists, and to train the soldiers contained in these lists. Furthermore, the Komnenian system relied heavily upon large, centrally organized expeditions, and less upon the initiative of local military officials. *Strategoi* and local officials were not as important in a system in which the central government maintained direct control of its manpower.⁴⁴

Kazhdan, in *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, briefly traces the origins of the Komnenian system of taxation and support. Both he and Whittow agree that references to

⁴³ Choniates, *Historia*, 208–9; Ostrogorsky, 372 (equating the granting of *pronoia* with Byzantine feudalism); John Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London-New York, 1993), 129–39. A. Hohlweg, “Zur Frage der Pronoia in Byzanz,” in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 60 (1967), 288–308; Hélène Ahrweiler, “La ‘pronoia’ à Byzance,” in *Structures féodales et féodalisme dans l’occident méditerranéen (X^e–XIII^e siècles)* Collège de l’Ecole Française de Rome 44 (Rome, 1980), 681–89. See also George Ostrogorsky, “Die Pronoia unter den Komnenen,” *Zbornik Radova* 12 (1970), 41–45. See Haldon, “The Army and the Economy: The Allocation and Redistribution of Surplus Wealth in the Byzantine State,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 72 (1992), 138–40, for *pronoia* and the raising and supplying of soldiers; and his “Military Service, Military Lands, and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993), 17–18, 60–61 for evidence up to the tenth century. These are collected, with other articles about Byzantine administration and the army, in Haldon, *State, Army and Society in Byzantium: Approaches to Military, Social and Administrative History, Sixth to Twelfth Centuries* (Aldershot, 1995), nos. 6 and 7.

⁴⁴ This is in contrast to the suggestion that the central government, as a result of the fiscalization of the *strateia*, used state revenues to provide support for the great families of the capital against the provincial elite. The largest Komnenian armies were mustered under Manuel, and we have evidence of land grants during his reign. The granting of *pronoia* appears to have been a fiscally sound method for raising troops, and under the management of efficient emperors it did not abrogate the central government’s prerogatives over the revenues it granted.

soldiers’ land-holdings do not appear before the tenth century (when we begin to see evidence of their existence in imperial edicts). According to Kazhdan, Nikephoros Phokas’ rearrangement of fiscal duties, which promoted sailors to infantry and infantry to cavalry, was an aberration.⁴⁵ Macedonian legislation depicts the *stratiotai* performing their duties as soldiers, while the *georgioi*, the farmers, provide the taxes that support these activities. In this context Kazhdan analyzes the concept of *syndotai* (contributors), and the related *allelengyon* (mutual tax obligation).⁴⁶ *Pronoia* underwent considerable development during the Komnenian period. Under Alexios I they were given as rewards for military service, although they lacked specific military obligations. *Pronoia* seem to be secular *charistikia* (monasteries given as a benefice for life, or for three generations). However, *pronoia* did not entail governing or supervisory obligations. Under Manuel I, these gifts become a method of paying soldiers. Nevertheless, Niketas Choniates presents the *pronoia* of Manuel as if it were an investment opportunity for urban small businessmen rather than an effective means of supporting an army.

Lemerle offers an altogether different notion of *pronoia*, reading the Komnenian period as an era during which free communes of peasants were transformed into dependent serfs (*paroikoi*). Those who dominated this free peasantry were the powerful families (the *dynatoi*) and the Church, who were enriched by donations from the state (a thesis that Mark Whittow rejects, characterizing it as a “moral tale”).⁴⁷ The ruin of the *strateia*, the free peasant soldier, was the basis for the institution of *pronoia*. Lemerle notes that the use of the word *strateia* in the Komnenian century differs from its usage during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.⁴⁸ Military obligation, accord-

⁴⁵ Alexander Kazhdan, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1985), 18 (citing Zonaras, III, 502.5–9).

⁴⁶ The *syndotai* were individuals who resided within a community (*chorion*) and shared financial responsibility for communal obligations. *Allelengyon* was the specific responsibility for maintaining the military capability of a soldier from the *chorion*. If the soldier was unable to support himself, the *allelengyon* required that his neighbors support him so that he would be able to go on campaign.

⁴⁷ Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, 201, 207.

⁴⁸ Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, 223–24. Lemerle dates the first mention of *pronoia* with reference to a piece of property to 1136, in the reign of John II. There is little direct evidence to support Lemerle’s thesis that *pronoia* matured into an institution during John’s reign; certainly *pronoia* appear to be fully formed under Manuel, but their development may well trace its origins earlier.

ing to Lemerle, was unrelated to land holdings under the Komnenian emperors and became a fiscalized obligation: a tax. This may seem an anomalous reading, since most Byzantinists accept that *pronoia* were important during Manuel's reign. We should remember that Lemerle is generalizing about the Komnenian period. Niketas Choniates states that payment in cash was normal during Manuel's reign; funds earmarked to pay army and navy troops were diverted to the treasury, and these measures had disastrous consequences.⁴⁹ Literary evidence and campaign descriptions depict an army with large elements that came from the provinces and were part of a provincial military structure. It appears unjustified to conclude that the use of *pronoia* precluded other methods of payment, or that *pronoia* reflected vast changes in the social structure of villages throughout the Byzantine Empire. It is also premature to argue that cash pay was the primary method of financing troops in Alexios' reign, and that the system of landed support was transformed under John and Manuel. The apparent discontinuities in Choniates' evidence indicate that the Komnenoi utilized both cash payments and *pronoia* to support their soldiers. Choniates suggests that grants of *pronoia* replaced a more efficient system of land grants and cash pay, but his descriptions of how troops were raised and the kinds of men who fought in Komnenian armies refutes this interpretation.

Financing the Komnenian Army

Evidence indicates that the Byzantine Empire grew increasingly prosperous under the Komnenian emperors. Our literary sources describe market fairs, economic activity in Constantinople, and even city merchants who disposed of excess capital by purchasing *pronoia*.⁵⁰ Increased tax burdens such as those mentioned by Theophylact of Ochrid are not necessarily evidence of economic deprivation. As long as the peasants were able to survive and pay their taxes, their level of prosperity did not directly affect state income. The state's wealth increased indirectly, the result of increased Venetian activity stemming from privileges that they received from Alexios I. This increased

⁴⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 208–09; Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, 232 ff.

⁵⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 207–09. Monasteries also became rich from imperial and noble donations.

wealth is also apparent in the prosperity of Hellas before Roger II's raids. The state's precarious finances forced Alexios to make coin from liturgical implements; John and Manuel, in contrast, spent huge sums on the army. In our analysis of the financial basis of the Byzantine army the only thing that really matters is that the empire was able to pay for adequate military forces. From the standpoint of military effectiveness, the Komnenian economic system was a complete success.

It is almost paradigmatic among historians that the economic prosperity of the peasantry is tied to the prosperity of the state; this is not the case in the Komnenian period. Exploitation of the primary producers' surplus was essential both to the Byzantine military requisition system as well as for collecting taxes, but the important question is how thoroughly the *state* was able to exploit and obtain this surplus. This is a critical problem in the late Komnenian period and during the Angelos dynasty, from 1180 to 1200. From 1118 to 1180 the empire's wealth was at least as great as it was during the Macedonian period. But Macedonian prosperity was not tied to the state's military power; indeed, legislation was in part crafted to protect the state's military power from appropriation by the *dynatoi*: in other words, it was designed to protect military lands and to damage the *dynatoi*. Komnenian military power had a different basis. It relied heavily upon new forms of military lands, in part upon *pronoia*, but also upon troops paid directly by the treasury and supplied by the state. After Manuel's death, increased wealth in the provinces meant that local dynasts, Isaac Komnenos in Cyprus, Leo Sgouros in Athens, and the Roupenids in Cilicia, had the power to withhold these funds from the central government and to use them for their own purposes. Paradoxically, the Komnenian system created prosperity and fiscalized some of military obligations of the tenth and early eleventh century. By doing so, it gave local dynasts the tools to resist central control. An examination of how the Komnenian policy of governing through a matrix of extended family-members led to a decentralized administrative system is outside the scope of this limited discussion. It is enough to note that under Andronikos I (1080–85), when the emperor attempted to subvert this system and combat the power of the *dynatoi*, the Komnenian system of inclusive, family government collapsed.

This is not a form of Byzantine feudalism. This transformation did not result in a western European system of mutual, interconnected

obligations: public power held in private hands. Instead, the Byzantine system was marked by a system of centralized taxation and a local bureaucracy that collected fiscalized revenues. This redirection and subversion of fiscalized obligations caused a crisis of manpower under Isaac II Angelos (1185–95), and Alexios III (1195–1203). There is no anomaly in the statement that the Byzantine empire of the late twelfth century was extremely wealthy, but that the Angelid emperors were able to exploit little of that wealth. The highly organized military support systems of the Macedonian and Palaiologan emperors would lead one to expect some form of internally consistent method of maintenance under the Komnenoi. The Komnenian system of maintenance, however, was a hodge-podge of systems. Some, like the settlement of defeated peoples as recruits, were traditional, while some, like *pronoia*, were innovative.

The Soldiers of the Komnenoi

In previous chapters we examined Komnenian soldiers in their natural physical setting: battle. The Komnenian army was also divided into specific organizational categories off the field of battle. The *themata* of the tenth-century armies, organized under semi-independent *strategoi*, no longer existed. The *tagmata*, Byzantine troops stationed as a mobile force in the capital, consisting of the *exkoubitai*, the *scholae*, the *hikanatoi*, and the *opsikianoï*, had not survived the tribulations of civil war and Turkish invasion. Between the end of the Macedonian dynasty (ca. 1040) and the accession of Alexios I (1081), the *tagmata* of the capital atrophied. The Asiatic *thematic* armies no longer existed in any coherent form, particularly with the dispersal of the Iberian army of the *theme* of Armeniakon. By the reign of Nikephoros Botaneiates the guard units had coalesced into the *scholai* and the *exkoubitai*. Alexios Komnenos was domestic of the *scholai* under Botaneiates, which by 1079 meant he was commander in chief of all the imperial armies.⁵¹ This title had lost its earlier association

⁵¹ For Alexios as domestic of the *scholae*: Anne Comnène, *Alexiade* (Paris, 1937–76), ed. B. Leib., vol. I, p. 18, ll. 7–10 (bk. 1, chap. 4), and I, p. 24, ll. 8–14 (bk. 1, chap. 6); as domestic of the West: vol. I, p. 58, l. 26 (vol. I, chap. 16); as *grand domestique*: vol. I, p. 28, ll. 16 and 19 (bk. 1, chap. 7 and ff. These titles appear to have been used interchangeably by Anna Komnene, although it is uncertain whether

with the *tagmatic* commander, and simply meant that Alexios was the imperial commander rather than a subordinate or local military leader.

Despite these changes, Alexios' army still included two basic types of troops: Guards in the capital and levies from the provinces. Under Alexios these levies were not called up by the *strategoi* of particular *themes*. Our sources also do not mention them defending their territories in the absence of an imperial army and it is anachronistic to think of them as *thematic* troops in a tenth-century sense. Only much later, in Kinnamos, do we see local troops called up with reference to a specific to a duke (*doux*). Under Alexios the levies were cavalry from the provinces near the capital: Macedonia and Thrace. They were called out whenever the emperor needed an army.

The most important guard unit throughout the Komnenian period was the Varangian guard. The Varangians fought the Normans at Dyrrachion under their commander Nampites; under John II Komnenos they fought the Pechenegs. The Immortals, reconstituted by Michael VII, were apparently the best Byzantine cavalry Alexios possessed. During the Norman wars Alexios created the *archontopouloi* from the sons of slain officers. The *hetaireia* existed in 1078, at the time of Bryennios' rebellion, as did the corps of the *maniakites* (named for a famous officer of the 1050s). The *exkoubitai* survived until the battle of Dyrrachion in 1081. The *maniakites* do not appear to have survived the civil wars.⁵² Guard units that disappeared included the *opsikianoï*, and the *vigla/arithmos*. After Alexios, the *scholae* and the *exkoubitoi* also disappear from our sources. A much simpler system prevailed: the Varangians were supplemented by the Immortals. The *archontopouloi* appear to have been trained from scratch, but we can assume that this was an economy measure, and that officers' sons had the means to equip themselves.

This arrangement, motivated largely by economic necessity, was radically different from the centrally equipped guards regiments of the Macedonian emperors, and reflects the difficult financial situation that Alexios faced during the 1080s. Levied cavalry included

this was a deliberate attempt to attribute three titles to Alexios or because time had dimmed her memory of events.

⁵² The best description of these *tagmatic* units, their genesis and disappearance, appears in Hans-Joachim Kuhn, *Die byzantinische Armee im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1991), esp. 243–59. The last commander of the *exkoubitoi* was Constantine Opos, who led them in the battle of Dyrrachion, against Robert Guiscard. See Kuhn, 98.

troops from Macedonia, Thessaly, and Thrace. These men fought mounted and were called *kataphraktoi*. Other levies included archers and *pellasts*, both of unknown geographical origin. Supplementing these men were mercenary contingents of Flemish knights and of Asiatic Turkish auxiliaries. After 1090, the Pechenegs defeated by Alexios formed the *tagma* of the Moglena Pechenegs.⁵³

Our evidence for the existence of certain units, including their support, concentrates almost exclusively upon the cavalry. Infantry, both *pellasts* and archers, appear when Alexios is outside of Constantinople, attempting to gain entrance to the city during his rebellion.⁵⁴ They also appear when Alexios organizes his men for his famous retreat during his 1116-17 campaign against the Seljuk Turks.⁵⁵ However, they form an otherwise mute group in our study of Byzantine army finances. They were undoubtedly always present in battle, but they were never part of the glorious cavalry actions that fueled Anna Komnene's reminiscences. The infantry must also have been present at each of the dozens of sieges the Byzantines conducted in John and Manuel's reigns, but they were not the part of the army (the cavalry) that the nobility fought with, and Byzantine authors do not waste time with "unimportant" people. Their infrequent mention in our sources leaves us with an unbalanced perception of Byzantine army organization and finances.⁵⁶

⁵³ Zonaras, III, 740-41.

⁵⁴ *Alexiade*, I, 90, ll. 16-20.

⁵⁵ *Alexiade*, III, 198, ll. 9-26; 203-4; 213, ll. 5-26.

⁵⁶ Miklosich & Müller, vol. VI, p. 47, ll. 3-7. This chrysobull exempts the Patmos monastery from the exactions of the following groups: the Rhomaioi, the Rus, the Varangians, the Koulpingoi (whose identity is uncertain), the Inglinoi, the Frangoi (Normans), the Nemitsoi (Germans), Bulgarians, Saracens (Turks), Alans, Abasgoi, and Immortals. The *archontopouloi* are not mentioned. In any case it seems likely that the *archontopouloi* constituted a palace training corps rather than a military unit, despite their apparent one-time use as a battle unit by Alexios. The Inglinoi, who made up a substantial part of the Varangian guard, are mentioned twice. The Rus, known only from their association with the Varangian guard, are also listed separately. It appears that the chrysobull contains traditional designations for military units and peoples, as well as designations reflecting contemporaneous terminology; the Varangians and the Rus, for example, were no longer synonymous. Bulgarians, who are mentioned once by Anna Komnene as recruits, but who never appear in any Komnenian field army, as well as Abasgoi, and Koulpingoi, appear in the chrysobull, but are absent from our literary sources' battle accounts. Alans appear once, in the 1177 campaign against the Seljuk Turks. Pechenegs and Cumans are not mentioned for the simple reason they had not yet been defeated and settled within the empire. What we have is simply a bull which contains all the soldiers the empire had used for the last fifteen or twenty years.

Alexios' Successors: John II and Manuel I

Many units that figured prominently in accounts of Alexios' army seem to have disappeared by reigns of John II and Manuel I Komnenos. The Varangians appear throughout the Komnenian period. John II needed to circumvent them to enter the imperial palace when he seized the throne as Alexios lay dying; he later used them against the wagon-circle of the Pechenegs (*Scyths*).⁵⁷ The rest of the 'guard' units from Alexios' reign no longer appear in John and Manuel's armies. The *athanatoi* (Immortals) are mentioned in the exemption granted to the lands of the Monastery of St. Christodoulos on Patmos, which dates to 1088, but do not appear after the Pecheneg wars (1090s) in our literary sources.⁵⁸ The Immortals, and the *archontopouloi* (officer's sons) do not seem to have endured as a military unit after the death of Alexios. The earlier guard regiments, the *scholae* (the schools), the *Vigla* (the watch), the *exkoubitoi* (select imperial guard), and the *hikanatoi* (another guard unit), were each commanded by a *domestic* during the tenth century. These were either placed under the control of the *domestikos of the scholai* (the Byzantine commander in chief), during the period preceding the reign of Alexios, or disbanded.⁵⁹ Only the *exkoubitoi* survive until the battle of Dyrrachion (1081). It is possible that units popularly referred to by these names existed, but our literary and legal sources offer no evidence of it.

The only guards—the *hypaspistai*—(literally shield-bearers) that appear in John's reign were the Varangians.⁶⁰ John maintained non-guard units, a Macedonian division, Turkish divisions, and he also recruited new troops.⁶¹ One cannot imagine that *neoti* (new men) were foreigners; these were native Byzantine regiments that supplemented the Macedonian regiment. Choniates mentions these Macedonians

⁵⁷ Kinnamos, 8, ll. 14-22.

⁵⁸ Miklosich and Müller, VI, 47, l. 7.

⁵⁹ For the *exkoubitoi*, see: *Alexiade*, I, 151, l. 19. For the *scholae*, *Alexiade*, I, 18, l. 9; I, 24, l. 10; I, 34, l. 13 ff. Only the *exkoubitoi* and the *scholae* are mentioned in Anna Komnene. Zonaras mentions neither.

⁶⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 15. That these are the Varangians is evident from Choniates' description, where he identifies them as guards, armed with very tall shields and single-edged axes.

⁶¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 23 (Macedonian legion), 25 (Turkish divisions.) For the levies, see 21.

several times.⁶² Both Thessalians and Thracians served in imperial armies; there is no reason to expect that the empire stopped using these men. Choniates is simplifying, calling all western native troops by the name of the most important western province, Macedonia. Choniates refers to "Romans" (Byzantines) during John's Pontic campaign, and mentions picked lancers and Latin cavalry, as well.⁶³ We know that the infantry were present in large numbers: the cavalry borrowed their standards to trick the Turks into believing they were more numerous. Pecheneg cavalry were settled in the empire after Alexios' victory in 1091, and other recruits were drawn from those who were defeated by John II in 1122. Latins and Kelts are often mentioned, not merely as ad hoc mercenary units, but part of the regular Byzantine army. Historians have treated these units as *tagmata*, and assumed that that foreigners made up the elite units of the Komnenian army. This is a matter of historical semantics rather than of actual organization.⁶⁴ These foreign units fulfilled the tactical role of the old *tagmatic* units, but so did the Macedonians, the picked lancers of John II, and the picked Byzantines of Manuel I at Semlin. Organizationally, these were not *tagmatic* troops, and all organizational elements, of whatever number or origin, are called *tagmata* in the sources of the Komnenian period.⁶⁵

While we cannot credit John II with a program to reorganize the army, the army did change following Alexios' death. Ever pragmatic, John did not bother to maintain the *athanatoi* or the *archontopuloi*, since their military usefulness was marginal. Native units appear in Anna Komnene's account, and they continue to appear in the sources for John's reign, often named after geographical regions. Presumably soldiers who were better armed and mounted, who might earlier have entered the corps of the Immortals, the *athanatoi*, or the *Archontopuloi*, became the "picked men" that John and Manuel occasion-

⁶² Choniates, *Historia*, 23, and 29-30.

⁶³ Choniates, *Historia*, 35.

⁶⁴ Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*, 29.

⁶⁵ Examples of use of the word *tagma* abound, of which only a few are mentioned here. Kinnamos generally uses the word synonymously with *phalanx*, to refer to any military unit, rather than the old *tagmata* units. See, for example, Kinnamos, 271, ll. 7, 10. Choniates uses the word *tagma* to refer to particular groups in battle, but without any further significance. Choniates, *Historia*, 182, l. 49. *Tagmata* (the plural of *tagma*) is used in a general sense for "division" or "regiment," while it is used to refer to the guard units of the capital; (see 180, l. 81); *phalanx*, and *tagma* are used interchangeably.

ally used separately from their native Byzantine units. The composition of units under John and Manuel appears similar to that of units from the tenth century. Picked men normally operated within units from particular geographic regions, and were occasionally removed from their units for special operations. Whether the organization and composition of the Byzantine army under John is accurately represented by the sources, or whether the sources' sparse recollection of John's reign has left us with no record of the *archontopuloi* and *athanatoi*, or the other guard units, is impossible to ascertain with complete confidence. However, the absence of these units from our very detailed accounts of Manuel's reign argues for their dissolution under John. The army of John II represents the final form that the Komnenian armies took with respect to physical organization.

Manuel's army fielded the same soldiers as did John's army, and source descriptions of battles (as opposed to Choniates' rhetorical charges) indicate no great innovations in equipment and tactics. What we would like to know about Manuel's army is whether the soldiers who appear in John's campaigns were present in the same proportions in Manuel's army. It is difficult to produce accurate numbers for particular units and troop types (*peltasts*, *kataphraktoi*), or for particular ethnic groups. All the historian can do is attempt to judge their relative importance by examining how frequently they appear in battle, and to define their role. Choniates' description of *pronoia*, for example, does not tell us whether larger numbers of foreigners became soldiers because of the sale of *pronoia*. Nor are we able to ascertain whether most *pronoia*rs, the holders of *pronoia*, were Byzantines. Choniates is disgusted that foreigners held *pronoia*, but simultaneously describes how Byzantine shopkeepers and grocers bought *pronoia* for the price of a horse or for a few coins.⁶⁶

Despite Choniates' claim that Manuel reformed the system under which the army was maintained, (regularization of the *pronoia* system of maintenance) and retrained Byzantine soldiers with new weapons and tactics—our sources for Manuel's army show cavalry and infantry, Byzantines and foreigners, light troops and heavy, in the same proportions as they appeared in John's expeditions. Native troops were maintained in the provinces of both Asia Minor and Europe, and these eastern and western divisions formed regular units

⁶⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 118-19.

in Manuel's native military establishment.⁶⁷ At the battle of Semlin (1167), Byzantine units formed the left flank and parts of the center division, and undoubtedly provided most of the infantry, constituting in total about two thirds of the army. Western troops also appear regularly; they were present at Semlin, and with Manuel's army at Kerkyra, and on the Myriokephalon campaign.⁶⁸ Their regular appearance in Komnenian armies suggests that calling them mercenaries misstates their role. To the contrary: they were regular soldiers of the Byzantine army, much like the Gurkhas in modern-day British service. They were paid by the imperial treasury and were no more "mercenary" than the Varangians. These troops differed from the Anconan knights hired for Manuel's Italian campaigns. These Anconans were clearly mercenaries; they left Doukas' army when their demand for increased pay was refused. Pecheneg units, by contrast, formed part of the regular Komnenian army. The Pechenegs had settled within the empire, in the *theme* of Moglena,⁶⁹ and in western Asia Minor. The Cumans as well were settled on imperial land, where we find them interfering with the lands of the Lavra monastery.⁷⁰ Serbians had been settled near Nicomedia, and these troops should also be considered part of the native army. They may have been among the soldiers Andronikos Vatatzes mustered to fight the Turks, and earlier, when levies were sent to attack Amaseia.⁷¹ Iberians (Georgians) and Masagetai (Alans) also accompanied the Byzantine army to Italy, where they appear to be regular parts of the army; they remained loyal while the mercenaries demand extra pay.⁷² Alans also appear with the army John Vatatzes, Constantine Doukas, and Michael Aspietes raised to defeat the raid of "the Atabeg" (1177-78).⁷³ Choniates mentions lightly armed soldiers, but

⁶⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 77, l. 13. For the siege of Kerkyra, tens of thousands were mustered. The "eastern" troops appear not to have suffered very much from the defeat at the battle of Myriokephalon. They were mustered by Vatatzes for his 1177 campaign and performed well.

⁶⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, p. 89, l. 51. The garrison that Manuel installed after the city's capture was "composed of Germans".

⁶⁹ Zonaras, III, 740-41. The specific reference to the Moglena Pechenegs appears on p. 741, l. 5.

⁷⁰ Lemerle, *Recherches*, 276.

⁷¹ For Vatatzes, see Choniates, *Historia*, 182, for the Serbs, 16, ll. 15-24.

⁷² Kinnamos, 167, l. 6. "They sent both Iberians and Alans with which to skirmish".

⁷³ "But one of the Alan allies rushed to the spot where this novel rowing terminated, and slew him with his two-edged sword." Choniates, *Historia*, 194, ll. 11-12

not their nationality.⁷⁴ These soldiers included the *peltasts* mentioned in Alexios' and Isaac Angelos' reigns, as well as the archers who were present at Myriokephalon with each division of the army.⁷⁵ There is a natural tendency among modern historians to differentiate troop types and functions by modern definitions of *mercenary* and *national*; these modes of defining soldiers' origins, functions, and social role, however, are fallacious. Within the Byzantine context, troops that were paid regularly, or resided within the empire, can hardly be called mercenary from the standpoint of how they were supported, regardless of their national origin or how their pay was provided. If we define mercenaries as soldiers paid for services, who leave service when they are not paid, then most modern armies are "mercenary" armies.

Who were the nomadic soldiers who served with the Byzantine army, as distinct from the empire's permanent settlers? When Andronikos Komnenos escaped from prison in 1165 and rebelled against Manuel I, he found it easy to obtain Cuman horsemen to raid the empire.⁷⁶ What is significant about this incident is not whether he actually procured these men; our sources indicate that someone of Andronikos' experience and stature could raise a sizable Cuman army merely by offering an opportunity for plunder. Therefore, we must differentiate between the Cumans that Manuel used against Conrad in 1147, outside of Constantinople, and those auxiliary bands that were readily available from territories outside of the borders of Byzantium. Such troops were inexpensive, and while on campaign these men "paid" themselves at their leisure, from plunder. That the Great Lavra monastery had to be protected from their depredations gives the best indication of their value: they were inexpensive troops and they were available in great numbers. Their disadvantage was that they might not recognize the peacetime difference between friend and foe. With respect to organization and troop types, the army of Manuel appears to have been almost the same as that used by John. Its support, whether by *pronoia*, or by direct settlement of soldiers on land, is examined in the next section.

(trans. Magoulias, 110). "ἀλλὰ τινος τῶν ἐπικούρων Αλανῶν ἐπιδραμόντος ὅπου τὴν καὶνὴν ἐκείνην εἰρεσίαν σχάσειν ἐμελλεν, ἀναιρεῖται ἀμφιστόμφ κνώδοντι."

⁷⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 125, ll. 29-31.

⁷⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 181.

⁷⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 132. Andronikos was guest of the governor of Galitzia in 1165-66.

Pronoia and Fiscal Maintenance

The question of how the army was supported poses particular problems for the Komnenian period. Evidence for the financial maintenance of the Byzantine army from the tenth through the eleventh century appears in several sources: Leo VI's *Taktika*, the *De Cerimoniis*, and the *De Administrando Imperio* of Constantine VII, as well as the legislation of Basil II.⁷⁷ Much of the military support system of these emperors was destroyed between 1025 and 1081. The main Komnenian inheritance from the Macedonian dynasty is manifested in the use of vestigial titles for military officers. In the west troops continued to be raised from the provinces of Thrace, Thessaly, and Macedonia, but Komnenian sources offer few details about how they were supported. Pachymeres discusses the Byzantine army of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in some detail, bemoaning the loss of soldiers' pronoia. This is also mentioned by Kantakouzenos, who describes mercenaries and *pronoia*, and by Gregoras as well, who discusses the salaries of *pronoia*.⁷⁸ In this later context *pronoia* are often called *oikonomia* (dispensations), or *posotes*, which refers to the quantity and value of a piece of land. During the late period, an imperial *prostagma*, or order, assigned a *posotes* of *pronoia* in a region to a *pronoiar* or group of *pronoia*rs.⁷⁹

What did the Komnenian system of military support inherit from the Macedonian support system of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, and what of the Komnenian system survived to the Lascarid and Palaiologan period? The Komnenian period was separated from the Macedonian by fifty years of civil chaos and a further ten years of civil war. It was followed by twenty-five years of disruption under Andronikos I, Isaac II, and Alexios III, and by fifty years of foreign rule and internal transformation under Latin, Nicean, and Epirot emperors. Latin states dominated Thessalonike, the Peloponnesos, and Thrace, while the surviving Byzantine states, Epiros and Nicaea, concentrated their resources on defending their northern and eastern frontiers, respectively. The emperors of these splinter-

⁷⁷ C.E. Zachariae von Lingenthal, *Ius graecoromanum*, (Athens, 1931), I, 262 ff.; *Regesten Der Kaiserurkunden des Ostromischen Reiches von 565-1453*, ed. Franz Dölger (Munich and Berlin, 1925), 783. Ostrogorsky, *History*, 217.

⁷⁸ Bartusis, *Late Byzantine Army*, 162-63.

⁷⁹ Bartusis, *Late Byzantine Army*, 162-70.

states were forced to direct most of their attention to defending their realms against each other. Their policies, moreover, were local, bearing little resemblance to Komnenian foreign policy—particularly after the reign of Michael VIII. The Komnenian period is therefore distinct from what existed before and what appeared later, and needs to be analyzed based upon its own evidence.

The only explicit mention of land allotments for troops—the *stratitika ktemata*, (soldiers' lands)—between 1081 and 1190 appears in a chrysobull issued by Isaac Angelos in 1189.⁸⁰ There is no direct mention of this institution during the Komnenian period. References to *strateia* (fiscalized military obligations) appear in chrysobulls of Michael VII, Nikephoros III Botaneiates, and Alexios I Komnenos, but these seem to refer to imposts. This is in contrast to the complicated social and legal relations that regulated landed soldiers under the Macedonian emperors.⁸¹ Chrysobulls are definition enumerations of exemptions: they present deviations from normal imperial taxation or social procedures. The most important of these exemptions from Alexios' reign is a grant to the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos. The island had been granted to the monk Christodoulos in 1088 with a general exemption from duties, including exemption from the *strateiai*, the military tax.⁸² The *typikon* for the Pantokrator monastery, founded by John II in 1136, donates the territory of Madytos, located in the Thracian Chersonese, to that institution. The only exception to this grant is the lands of the soldiers (*choris ton strateion*).⁸³ Lemerle distinguishes a pattern

⁸⁰ Lemerle, *Recherches*, 265. As Lemerle notes, the *stratitika ktemata* mentioned in this chrysobull are different from the *stratitika ktemata* of the Macedonian period. This chrysobull is published in Miklosich & Müller, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca*, IV, 319.

⁸¹ See Dölger, no. 1005; Miklosich & Müller, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca*, Vol. 5, p. 137, l. 19; and Dölger, no. 1042; Miklosich & Müller, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca*, Vol. 5, p. 143, l. 31; and *Actes de l'Althos*, Actes de Lavra I, no. 31, l. 37, and Dölger, no. 1046; Miklosich & Müller, *Acta et Diplomata Graeca*, Vol. 6, p. 22, l. 29; and *Actes de Lavra* no. 41, l. 43. As Lemerle notes in *Recherches*, these chrysobulls list *strateia* in conjunction with *synone*, *kapnikon*, and *kastroktisia*.

⁸² Miklosich and Müller, VI, 53-55; Dölger, no. 1151. The *oikeiakon* represented the emperor's household finances. Also of note is a list of units of soldiers from whose exactions the monastery was exempt—perhaps the most important list of this type from the early Komnenian period.

⁸³ Lemerle, *Recherches*, 268. *Agrarian History*, 223. Lemerle finds the clearest parallel in the novel of Manuel Komnenos, of 1158, concerning monasteries, where *strateia* is listed among other fiscal obligations. Lemerle's conclusion stems largely from Niketas Choniates' statement that John of Poutze fiscalized the fleet-duties of

that led to the Komnenian military-fiscal structure: First, the Macedonian emperors maintained the landed *thematic* soldier, providing equipment and support for his military duties. Then, under the post-Macedonian emperors, from Constantine IX in the 1140s until the end of Alexios' reign (1118), the system of military maintenance became fiscalized: a tax. The literary evidence from John II and Manuel I leads Lemerle to then propose that these two emperors attempted to support their armies by again re-settling soldiers on landed property.⁸⁴

Legal sources from the Komnenian period consider estates and monasteries on islands, coastal areas, or in the empire's European territories. The fiscal system of the *themes* in Asia Minor was more fully developed than the European *theme* system. We cannot look at the system maintained by the Komnenian emperors and expect to find substantial elements of the support system in use a century before, particularly if we compare a system (the Macedonian) that was based upon the empire's Asiatic territories with another system (the Komnenian) based upon the empire's less-secure European provinces. There is evidence that soldiers' service requirements were commuted in return for fiscal payments in Asia Minor. We also have evidence in Choniates that John and Manuel drew recruits from these regions. This does not mean that a landed soldiery had been reconstituted on the model of the system used by the Macedonians. Manuel and John drew recruits from the region around Pergamon

the Aegean islands: that the *strateia* (the duties which encompassed the military landholding of the Macedonian period), had become completely fiscalized by Manuel's reign (Lemerle, *Recherches*, 268). This has led Lemerle to posit a specific army reform during the period of Manuel. However, we should note that Choniates' remark concerning transfer of revenues from provincial forces to the treasury refers solely to the fleet, and no specific mention is made of army fiscalization.

⁸⁴ Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, 225. For Lemerle's opinion of Manuel's reforms, see: 222-31. Lemerle concludes that Choniates' evidence indicates that 1. Soldiers were normally paid in cash, 2. Manuel substituted grants of *paroikoi* for these cash payments, 3. These grants had existed under John II, but were unusual until the reign of Manuel, 4. The popularity of these measures meant everyone wanted to be enrolled, 5. These measures resulted in a disastrous decline in the army's quality. Comparing the Komnenoi and the Macedonians, Lemerle concludes that 1. The military lands created a glorious army, a national army, 2. Fiscalization became rife in the mid-eleventh century, when the government decided it had entered an era of peace, 3. John II and Manuel Komnenos, or John of Poutze, tried to re-attach the army to the land through grants. See p. 241. This military *pronoia*, as indicated by Choniates, was a "proletarian" *pronoia*. Mercenaries remained the main strength of the army.

and Neokastra because it had become prosperous and stable in the thirty or forty years since its reconquest by Alexios and the First Crusade. That certain services were fiscalized, and the revenues from these services used to purchase mercenaries, does not mean that other methods of obtaining troops were ignored or did not predominate. If historians are disturbed by the presence of ethnically diverse elements, which do not appear to be mercenary, perhaps our definition of what it means to be Byzantine is problematic, and not the organization or ethnic character of the army.⁸⁵ Lemerle calls these non-Greek Byzantines a corps composed of foreigners, whether properly called mercenaries or not.⁸⁶ Of course, Lemerle later notes that *choria strateumena* appears near Aenos, in Thrace. These men refuse their obligations, rents, and services because of their position as soldiers.⁸⁷ Lemerle treats this as an exception, and believes that the *choria strateumena* in fact refers to fiscal revenues that were given to these soldiers. I would suggest that the *stratioton tou thematos Moglenon*, the soldiers of the Moglena *theme* of 1196 could be either these *pronoia*, or the *thematic* levies that appear from Alexios' reign onward.⁸⁸ One of the most eccentric examples of levies is the soldier-militia of

⁸⁵ Lemerle notes that the eleventh century saw great changes in the way emperors maintained their armies, one effect of which was the substitution of taxes for military service among residents of the east; he does not address western themes and their troops in any detail. Lemerle, *Recherches*, 270 n. 38. In *Actes de Laura* no. 28, ll. 79-80; Constantine X grants exemptions from the "... λογαρική εισπραξις βαράργων, ῥως ἢ σαρακηνων ἢ φράγγων ἢ ἑτέρων τινῶν ἐθνικῶν καὶ Ῥωμαίων, ..." "money exactions of the Varangians, Russians or Saracens or Franks or those of the race of the Romans," which apparently is concerned with the support of these troops. The settlement of conquered peoples on imperial territory was not a phenomenon unique to Alexios' reign. The same policy was followed by John II with the Pechenegs of Moglena (see Zonaras, III, 741), and by Manuel with the Serbs. Theophilos, in the ninth century, followed a similar policy with his "Persian" Turkish recruits. These ethnic units played a vital role in the reestablishment of the Byzantine army.

⁸⁶ Lemerle, *Recherches*, 270. "corps composés d'étrangers, mercenaires proprement dits ou non."

⁸⁷ Lemerle, "Recherches sur le régime agraire à Byzance: La Terre militaire à l'époque des Comnènes," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale X-XII siècles*, tome II, no. 3 (Poitiers, 1959), 275, n. 55 and 56. "Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosotira près d'Aenos (1152)," ed. L. Petit, in *Izv. Russk. Archeol. Inst. v. Konstantinopole* 13 (1908), 1-61.

⁸⁸ *Actes de Laura*, no. 45. There is speculation whether this act dates from the reign of Alexios I or Alexios III. The editors of the *Actes* place it in Alexios I's reign, whereas Dölger and Ostrogorsky date it to Alexios III Angelos' reign. In either reign we could expect to find soldiers from the *theme* of Moglena.

Patmos.⁸⁹ These men appear to have been members of a group described as "the soldiers and the other countrymen"—a reference to men who lived on the island, and were members of the *chorion*. Lemerle believes them to have been a local militia, but the other part of the passage, where the *hegoumenos* (abbot) of the monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos warns that they should not be permitted to leave in May, when pirates conducted raids, seems to indicate individuals who were not simply *choritai*, but possessed considerable personal independence. These men probably correspond to the levies, local soldiers with local responsibilities, that we see in Seleukeia and Dalmatia.⁹⁰

Anna Komnene

The problem with the historiography of land use and fiscal policy in the Byzantine Empire has been that legal sources, and especially the language used in legal sources, are open to a variety of interpretations. The advantage of literary sources, by contrast, is that the information is provided in an historical context; the reader may examine the circumstances leading to a particular decision. Our literary sources act as interpretive confirmation for our legal sources, and also stand on their own to help us interpret the imperial military support system.

In 1081 the state was unable to appropriate economic surpluses, either in kind or in coin. Alexios requisitioned sacred objects from the churches of Constantinople, melted them down, and minted coins. His family members and supporters also donated their gold and silver to the government, and the revenue was used to pay the army. Anna Komnene's contrived explanation is that the canons permitted appropriation of the liturgical implements to ransom prisoners of war. Alexios was desperate, and willing to both liquidate his family fortune and incur popular displeasure by looting the church in order to obtain currency. This series of events occurred after the battle of Dyrrachion (1081); the emperor needed specie to buy mercenaries to replace his damaged native army. However, even when

⁸⁹ Lemerle, *Recherches*, 276.

⁹⁰ For Dalmatian soldiers, see Kinnamos, 258. For those of Seleukeia, see Kinnamos, 179.

much of the soldiery was supported by a system of land-revenue grants (the *pronoia*, under Manuel), the emperor still brought a substantial war chest on campaign.⁹¹ This was used to give rewards and to pay for emergency supplies. The need for money to raise an army is not *prima facie* evidence that the army itself was mercenary. It is also not evidence that native troops were not present, or that military obligations had become fiscalized. Alexios relied on mercenaries only because the empire's normal recruiting lands were occupied at the beginning of his reign. In this case, both because the army had been destroyed in 1081, and because Robert Guiscard appropriated many of the soldiers who made up the Varangian guard, the emperor needed foreign troops more than usual.⁹²

There is other indirect evidence that a need for hard currency did not indicate a mercenary army or a fiscalized army support system. Anna describes how Bohemond's counts, who had not been paid for four years, grew restless; it became an easy matter for Alexios to bribe some of them. Anna's description gives us two pieces of information. First, those who wanted to "serve with pay in the imperial army, would be placed on the rolls and enjoy good wages which they themselves could determine."⁹³ We can assume that imperial pay, as irregular as Anna makes it seem, was more reliable than the pay available in Norman service; Alexios' bribes would otherwise have been ineffective. Second, the continued existence of a registry of soldiers suggests that the military bureaucracy had not completely collapsed in the aftermath of Manzikert, or that, if it had, it quickly revived. This procedure was continued during John and Manuel's reigns; Kinnamos describes how Manuel consulted such regimental lists near Ikonion in 1146.⁹⁴ The value of such registers is also indicated in Alexios' offer of imperial registration to trick and capture the Paulicians of Thrace, who were examined, registered—and immediately thrown into captivity. The act of registration, when the potential soldiers were examined in small groups, was used to separate

⁹¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 186; Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, II, 102-4. Michael the Syrian, ed. Chabot, *Chronicle* (Paris, 1908), XX.5, vol. 3, pp. 370-72.

⁹² For the sacred vessels, *Alexiade*, II, 10-11; For the men from "Thule," see II, 46-47 (III, p. 82, ll. 26-29). Anna remarks that the men of Thule were fighting with Robert "through force of circumstances."

⁹³ *Alexiade*, II, 32. ll. 10-15.

⁹⁴ Kinnamos, 55. ll. 4-7.

the Paulicians from one another, which made jailing them possible. Even at this early date (1083) and despite its irregularity, imperial pay was highly desirable.⁹⁵

The value attached to such registration is confirmed later in Alexios' reign (in 1114-15), when prominent Manicheans who had converted to Orthodoxy were rewarded with officerships, a process that must have included registration. Chrysobulls guaranteed these commissions.⁹⁶ Wages and pay are again mentioned during the Scythian war, when Tatikios was sent to Adrianople (1086) to pay the soldiers their annual wages, (*misthos*), and to recruit (*syllagein*) a new army.⁹⁷ These two events, payment and recruitment, were apparently simultaneous. It was undoubtedly an element of imperial policy to pay a recruitment bonus—necessary incentive when recruits would be risking life and limb for an emperor who had been unsuccessful in his recent wars.

Supporting the Army in the Field

The *Opsikianoï* (the Byzantine logistical corps) disappeared in the chaos following the defeat at Manzikert and the occupation of much of Asia Minor by the Seljuk Turks. Who took their place? Alexios relied on the soldiers and herds of Thrace to provide transport and supplies for his armies, and these support troops also played a role in the wars of John II and Manuel I. During the so-called Scythian war, when the emperor was between Bulgarophygos and Little Nicaea, Joannakes and Nicholas Maurokatakalon were instructed to "round up infantry from the whole district, with wagons and their ox-teams."⁹⁸ Later, when the emperor was again fighting the Scyths, and was preparing the army for the great battle of Lebounion (1091), Melissenos was ordered to collect recruits from a wide area. Foot soldiers from the region piled baggage on ox-wagons, with supplies, and were sent to Alexios.⁹⁹ These passages, combined with evidence from John

⁹⁵ *Alexiade*, II, 44, ll. 27-29.

⁹⁶ *Alexiade*, III, 185, ll. 1-4. Anna says that Alexios gave chrysobulls to these men, which enabled them to transfer their benefits to their sons and grandsons.

⁹⁷ *Alexiade*, II, 83, ll. 17-22.

⁹⁸ *Alexiade*, II, 126, ll. 22-23. "... πεζοὺς δὲ ἐξ ἀπάσης τῆς χώρας μετὰ ὁμαξῶν καὶ τῶν ταύτας ἐλκόντων βοῶν ἐκελάσσει."

⁹⁹ *Alexiade*, II, 138, ll. 1-6.

and Manuel's reigns, demonstrate that the Komnenian emperors developed sources outside of Asia Minor to obtain supplies and military transport. The Thracians served the same function in the Komnenian army as had the troops of the *theme* of Optimaton in the Macedonian and post-Macedonian periods.

The supply of the imperial fleet falls outside the parameters of this study. However, it is interesting to note that Anna Komnene's evidence accords with the information given by Niketas Choniates. Choniates recounts how John of Poutze diverted ship monies to the treasury, noting that the Cyclades usually provided ships for the imperial fleet. Anna provides similar information, noting that the fleet was equipped by the cities on the Asiatic coast, and from Europe.¹⁰⁰ With respect to fleet support there appears to be a high level of continuity between the Komnenian and earlier periods. In the Macedonian dynasty and earlier, the *theme* of Kibyrrhaiotai provided sailors and ships for a "thematic" fleet, while the central government provided its own squadrons. From what Anna and Choniates report, it appears that during the Komnenian period the provinces, either the Asiatic cities or the islands of the Cyclades, produced ships and sailors for the fleet. The conversion of ships into "ship-monies" was tantamount to abolishing the fleet.

Finally, we should not project upon Byzantine and medieval armies our modern preoccupation with centralization of supply and support. The Byzantine state maintained a sophisticated system of providing transport and supply for its army on campaign. Soldiers bought their own supplies when this was possible; in areas with substantial urban populations this appears to have been common. When cities were not readily accessible, army commanders set up markets.¹⁰¹ Crusader armies pillaged, but, according to western accounts, this was because Hungarian and Byzantine cities refused to sell them provisions.¹⁰² When Alexios mustered his army to campaign against the Seljuk Turks, Anna reports that soldiers stationed in Bithynia crossed the Sea of Marmara to obtain supplies from the capital.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Alexiade*, III, 65, ll. 22-24.

¹⁰¹ *Alexiade*, III, 112, ll. 19-24.

¹⁰² *Histoire Anonyme de la Première Croisade*, ed. and trans. Louis Brehier (Paris, 1924), 17. The anonymous author mentions "Turcopolis et Pincinatis,"—Turcopolis and Pechenegs. See also Raymond D'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, trans. J.H. Hill and L.L. Hill (Philadelphia, 1968), 16, 18, 24.

¹⁰³ *Alexiade*, III, 194, ll. 6-19. On Alexios' last Turkish campaign his soldiers were

Alexios' reign was characterized by a flexible and varied system of supply: Thracian drovers provided transport and soldiers; markets were used; pay was provided. But men nevertheless held land-holdings, from which they mustered when the imperial summons were delivered.

Niketas Choniates

Byzantine chroniclers tended to write about the army in association with the emperor's campaigns; descriptions of the army outside of its particular association with the emperor are rare as a consequence, references to money that the emperor carried on campaign might lead us to suppose that the system of paying the army was entirely monetary. Campaigns, however, were anomalies, special cases that required exorbitant funds; they were not characteristic of the day-to-day support of the army. Choniates provides very good evidence how the Komnenian army was administered, and describes the maintenance of the army as follows:

There is a law laid down by the Romans, which, I believe, prevails also among the barbarians, that provides for soldier's pay [*opsonia*], and their periodic inspection to ascertain whether they are well-armed and have cared for their horses; the new recruits were first tested to see if they were able-bodied, skilled in archery, and experienced in brandishing the lance, [*ei kradainein dory epeskasan*] and only then were they registered in the military rolls [*tois katalogois engraphesthai*]. This emperor, pouring into the treasures the so-called gifts of the paroikoi, [*tais legomenais ton paroikon doreais*], like water into a cistern, sated the thirst of the armies by the payment of provision money, and thereby abused a tactic begun by former emperors, and rarely resorted to by those who had frequently thrashed the enemy.

He was not aware that he was enfeebling the troops by pouring countless sums of money into idle bellies and mismanaging the Roman provinces. The brave soldiers lost interest in distinguishing themselves. . . . The inhabitants of the provinces, who in the past had to pay the imperial tax-collector, now suffered the greatest horrors as the result of military greed, being robbed not only of silver and obols, but also stripped of their last tunics, and sometimes they were dragged away from their loved ones.

For these reasons, everyone wanted to enlist in the army. . . . After handing over a Persian horse or paying down a few gold coins, they were enrolled in the military registers without due examination and immediately were provided with imperial letters [*basilikois efodiasthesan*

grammasi] awarding them parcels of dewy land, wheat-bearing fields, and Roman tributaries [*Rhomaious hypoforous*] to serve them as slaves. Sometimes a Roman of royal bearing would pay taxes to a half-Turkish, half-Greek barbarian manikin who knew nothing of pitched battles. . . .

The disorderliness of the troops brought deserved suffering to the Roman provinces. . . . others were devastated, ravaged by our own men as if they were enemy lands.¹⁰⁴

When Choniates describes Manuel's management of the army, he uses the terms *opsonia* and *siteresia* interchangeably, to refer to salaries. *Opsonia*, properly "provisions" or military supplies, but usually used in the sense of wages, is synonymous with *siteresia*: victuals or forage money. This indicates the close connection this term had with the provisioning of soldiers; it was roughly equivalent to the late Roman *annona*. We should see in this conflation of two separate concepts a parallel with the legal treatment that *stratiotika ktemata* receives under the Komnenoi. *Stratiotes* (soldiers) are mentioned in conjunction with the *strateia*, (the military-tax), and indeed the *stratiotes* might pay the *strateia*, in its fiscal sense, without performing military service. *Strateusthai* could refer to campaigning, or to performing the duties associated with being the holder of the fiscal obligation of *strateia*. The development of *pronoia* under Manuel, and perhaps John II merely adds to this confusion.

The confusion of terms is one reason why Choniates' description is of historical interest. The passage gives no indication he recognized a difference between *opsonia* and *siteresia*; much of his career was spent in the financial bureaucracy, and he eventually became logothete of the Sekreta, a high financial post. It does not seem possible that he would have used the terms synonymously unless they were in fact synonymous.¹⁰⁵ The apparent interchangeability of *opsonia* and *siteresia* may well mirror the changes in imperial government under the Komnenian emperors when actual titles, such as *strategos*, might not indicate specific duties, while honorifics such as *sebastos* could indicate positions of real authority. This terminological interchangeability would also suggest changes in land-tenure and the social

quartered with the local population in Bithynia, and these villages provided for the horses and baggage animals.

¹⁰⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 208-09 (trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 118-19).

¹⁰⁵ Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, xiv.

structure of taxation, indicating fiscalization of the *strateia*, both for the fleet (as noted earlier) and now for the army. Yet we still find levies that are called up by local as well as imperial authority. Finally, we have evidence of the growth of *pronoia* as a method of supporting soldiers, and apparently also as a method of turning plentiful surplus land into immediate cash for the treasury.

Choniates also provides some evidence for the growth of *pronoia* as a method of supporting soldiers and apparently also as a method of turning plentiful surplus lands into immediate cash for the treasury. The passage quoted above describes how imperial troops were supported: provision money, salaries, and gifts of *pariokoi* (settlers), a reference to the farmers whose lands and revenues constituted *pronoia*. *Pronoia* are not specifically mentioned by Choniates; from the context, however, it is evident that he is referring to this kind of support. Men are enrolled in registers; they receive *basilika grammata* (imperial letters) that award them parcels of land, along with tributaries, responsible for paying taxes to the land holders.¹⁰⁶ Choniates claims that the troops supported by Manuel's land grants were not proficient at arms,¹⁰⁷ but the soldiers Manuel led on campaign always prove battle-worthy; even at Myriokephalon there was no rout. The Byzantine state possessed large quantities of arable land available for transfer to suitable military candidates.¹⁰⁸ Even if we take Choniates' comments at face value, the benefit to the treasury of "a few coins or a Persian horse" was apparently sufficient to make it worthwhile for the government to dispose of lands in this manner. We do not know how much land was given "per horse" or for Choniates' "three coins," and without this information it is difficult to judge whether Manuel's system was truly as disastrous as Choniates implies.

It has also been supposed that Manuel reformed the empire's taxation system, and this specific measure has been associated with general reforms within the Byzantine army. The argument is based upon three passages in Choniates' chronicle: First, Choniates complains that Manuel granted military lands to foreigners and tradesmen. Sec-

¹⁰⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 209. II. 36-49.

¹⁰⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 208-09; Lemerle, *Recherches*, 273.

¹⁰⁸ These lands were in Paphlagonia, Amaseia, and Neokastron. All three locations provided troops for imperial armies, and in some cases had settlements of defeated peoples settled there; for example, Nicomedia received Serbians. It is hard to imagine a shortage of land, when emperors were bringing in thousands of settlers.

ond, Choniates comments that John of Poutze, "procurator of the public taxes and grand commissioner and inspector of accounts," diverted ship-money levies from the fleet into the imperial treasury.¹⁰⁹ Finally, Choniates states that taxes were collected with a "Roman" and a barbarian working in conjunction, and that this resulted in abuses and loss of tax receipts.¹¹⁰ It is debatable whether this is an accurate assessment of Manuel's tax system, but the information at any rate tells us nothing about the army. We should not confuse the measures emperors took with respect to the fleet with army measures that in hindsight appear similar to us. This is merely coincidental. The Komnenian emperors always valued the army over the fleet, and the value placed upon land operations increased throughout the reigns of Alexios, John, and Manuel. Furthermore, the sources provide other evidence on how soldiers were supported and what sorts of levies were available to the army. Entire units of captives were settled on tracts, particularly in Asia Minor. The best example of such forced settlement is the Serbians, who John Komnenos forced to settle near Nicomedia.¹¹¹ Choniates states that some of them were made soldiers, and the rest were made tributaries. It is impossible to know exactly the precise duties from which the soldiers were exempted and therefore how they were different from the tribute-paying Serbians. Whatever these duties were, Serbian soldiers—non-tributaries—were settled with their non-soldierly, tributary compatriots. This situation parallels that of the earlier, *thematic* provincial military organization. This is an example of a Komnenian emperor, John II, creating an *ad hoc* solution to the problems of insufficient manpower and the need for settlers in reconquered lands. Like all three Komnenian emperors, John's solution was an expedient based on immediate needs: to seek a consistent economic policy in the treatment of land and soldiers is more a problem of historians' hindsight.

Whether or not military duties had been fiscalized, the empire continued to rely on its Thracian levies to provide transportation and supplies. Choniates states that during the Hungarian war of

¹⁰⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 55.

¹¹⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 205.

¹¹¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 16. Choniates states that John enrolled some in the army and made others tributaries. Choniates deliberately differentiates between simple farmers, and soldiers who were settled among them.

1153, Manuel ordered the troops from the western half of the empire to supply wagons and to furnish food to the army.¹¹² Was the *synone*—the obligation to sell or supply produce to the armed forces—gradually fiscalized in the eleventh and twelfth centuries?¹¹³ It may be that Choniates's anecdote has nothing to do with the *synone*; perhaps the funds from the *synone* were used to finance levies of wagons and supplies. But Choniates merely states that the soldiers were levied, and ordered to bring supplies and wagons. Unlike other examples of imperial decision-making, where we should rightly question Choniates' rhetorical intentions, there are no such obfuscating purposes here. Most importantly, this portage and supply duty appears to have been a regularized obligation of these Thracian units, whether it was reimbursed by contributions from Manuel's campaign chest or from collected taxes. This duty was not the responsibility of the central government. Presumably the soldiers in Thrace were sufficiently like the Serbian settlers-soldiers near Nicomedia, whose tributary compatriots both paid taxes and had oxen and wagons to go with their farm-lands. On the other hand, it appears that the Acro-Corinth garrison was not composed of the local population. They formed a unit sent by Manuel to protect economically valuable regions from the threat of Norman invasion.¹¹⁴ Again, the search for a single pattern within the Komnenian military support system is at odds with the more plausible reality: the state maintained its soldiers by a variety of expedients.

Manuel and John have left one piece of evidence for a well-ordered imperial support system. This was their use of *aplekta* (supply centers), although by the Komnenian period the term has disappeared from our authors' vocabulary.¹¹⁵ John frequently used Lopadaion in the east as his base of operations, while Manuel established fortified posts at Dorylaion and Soublaion to support his campaign against Ikonion in 1176. In 1134–35, John took refuge with his army at a fortress he had built on the Rhyndakos River in western Asia Minor.

¹¹² Choniates, *Historia*, 100.
¹¹³ Haldon, "Synone: Re-Considering a Problematic Term of Middle Byzantine Fiscal Administration," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 18, (1994), 140–42, 147 (reprinted in Haldon, *State, Army and Society*, no. 7).
¹¹⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 75.
¹¹⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 178; Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *Three Military Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. John Haldon (Vienna, 1990), 80–81.

Again, this appears to have been an imperial supply point.¹¹⁶ In the west, the imperial armies frequently gathered on the plains of Pelagonia, which were centrally located north of Thessalonike, and were a good mustering-point for troops from Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, and the rest of Europe. Combining these examples with the information that imperial agents watched over the roads and embarkation points,¹¹⁷ Choniates presents us with a picture of a sophisticated system of logistics and assembling soldiers. Imperial summons would go out for the army to muster, and imperial agents made sure that men traveled overland or by sea to their correct destinations, while ensuring the soldiers did not return home or otherwise shirk their duties. Local forces of a region provided transport for the army's needs in the form of carts and oxen. The emperor also had fortified points that became bases for campaign armies. Some, like Lopadaion, were well-established bases relatively near the capital. Others, like Soublaion, were advanced posts on the edge of enemy territory. When examining the Komnenian emphasis on siege warfare and the maintenance of fortified locations, we should remember that without such posts armies had little chance of maintaining themselves in the field for more than a few weeks. When the army remained on campaign far from supply points—as did John's campaigns at Kinte and Neokaisareia—the horses died, and the men went hungry. In such circumstances disaster was only narrowly averted. In 1176, once Manuel passed outside the system of outposts he had established, the army suffered from a lack of forage and water. All the local supplies had been destroyed or poisoned by the Turks.¹¹⁸

There is one more event that complicates this variegated picture of Komnenian military support. In 1147 the Second Crusade arrived in Byzantine territory. Manuel prepared for their entry into Constantinople by assembling the army, and repairing the city walls. Choniates also notes that "to the soldiers he supplied mail coats,

¹¹⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 20, ll. 22–25. Kinnamos notes that when Manuel gathered his army at Rhyndakos, most of the units left for home without imperial permission. This appears to indicate that the soldiers in question were settled on lands, and not dependent upon imperial payments for their livelihood. See Kinnamos, 299, l. 19.

¹¹⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 33. Choniates is our best source for this sort of information. Anna Komnene provides little information on supply and support; Kinnamos is more interested in the details of battles and the personal activities of Manuel.

¹¹⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 179.

and he armed them with bronze-tipped lances and wakened their courage with fleet horses, and encouraged them with the donation of monies.¹¹⁹ Some of these men were then stationed in Constantinople, while others followed Conrad's army to prevent it from plundering. Some infantry from the unit following Conrad themselves pillaged a German detachment.¹²⁰

Who were these men? If Choniates is not engaged in rhetorical exaggeration, it appears that the army was supplied from central stores, rather than possessing its own equipment. The troops Kinnamos later describes, who defeated the German army outside Constantinople, were four units of the "least warlike," then the "well-armored," then those with swift horses, and finally Cumans, Turks, and Byzantine archers.¹²¹ Coats of mail would not have been issued to the least warlike forces, nor to the archers, invariably the lightest-armed men. It is also difficult to imagine that the western mercenary troops in Byzantine employ would not have had their own horses and armor. This reference must allude to the Byzantine main line of cavalry, the heavy-armed *kalaphraktoi*. The notion of an army that trained with its arms and armor only when mustered at the capital, however, is exceedingly implausible. Would such an army have been able to defeat the Germans? The answer must be that these troops were Byzantine cavalry maintained by the central government, who lived near the capital, and for whose support the emperor was more responsible than for those troops either settled upon imperial lands in Asia, or who had similar holdings in the west. The "distribution of monies" that Choniates mentions should not be taken as an indication of regular pay by a central authority. According to Choniates, this donation was made to encourage the soldiers, rather than as regular pay. It was outside the day-to-day support structure of the army. The alternative to this explanation is to assume that Choniates is exaggerating Manuel's role in supplying the men, and that

¹¹⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 62, ll. 95-97: "To the soldiers he supplied mail coats, and he armed them with bronze-tipped lances and wakened their courage with fleet horses, and encouraged them with the donation of monies. . . ." (trans. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, p. 36) "τῇ δὲ στρατιᾷ χιτῶνας φολεῖν τοὺς χορηγεῖ κοντοῖς τε καθ'οπλίζει χαλκήρεσι καὶ ἵππους δρομικοὺς διεγείρει τὸ φρόνημα καὶ χρημάτων ἐπιρρώωνυσιν διαδύσειν".

¹²⁰ Kinnamos, 71, ll. 13-15. These were "some Romans from the register of the infantry." "... τινες Ῥωμαίων ἐκ πεζικῶν καταλόγων . . ."

¹²¹ Kinnamos, 77, ll. 15-20.

these men actually possessed their own arms and armor. Choniates was at one point *harmostes* of the Thracian cities and paymaster of the troops there. It is difficult to imagine what either exaggeration or misinformation would accomplish.¹²² So, we must conclude that these troops were Byzantines living near the capital, in Thrace and the environs of Constantinople, mustered for campaigns and supplied by Manuel. It is not outside the scope of probability that such provisions of equipment would supplement those brought into the field by regular troops. Mail armor per se might have been less customary than the scale armor our sources also mention, although why mail armor would have been a better defense than scale armor is less evident from our texts.

John Kinnamos

John Kinnamos offers his own, frequently attenuated, descriptions of how the Byzantine army was supported. The information he provides is often tantalizing, since he mentions events and activities that Choniates frequently omits. Unfortunately, Kinnamos neglects to provide the commentary and personal opinions that make Choniates so useful, and that flesh out his descriptions. Nevertheless, Kinnamos' account is valuable as an auxiliary to the *Historia* of Choniates. For example, Kinnamos mentions that John II augmented the army by settling Turkic peoples in the empire. John II defeats the Pechenegs and enrolls them on the military registers.¹²³ In 1124 he defeated the Turks, taking some as prisoners and forcing them to join the army.¹²⁴ Local forces under a *doux* are also mentioned, a reference that is lacking in Choniates. In 1158 Manuel ordered Alexios Kasianos, *doux* of Seleukeia, to assemble his native force.¹²⁵ In 1166, Kalouphes, *doux* of Dalmatia, campaigned against the Hungarians,¹²⁶ taking a few men from his own army and advancing against the Hungarians. Taken as a whole, Kinnamos' evidence supports the idea that

¹²² Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, xiii.

¹²³ Kinnamos, 8, ll. 20-21. Kinnamos says that they were trained as Romans (Byzantines) and served a long time.

¹²⁴ Kinnamos, 9, ll. 3-6.

¹²⁵ Kinnamos, 179, ll. 10-12.

¹²⁶ Kinnamos, 263, ll. 3-5.

there were local forces maintained in vulnerable provinces, under the direct control of the *doux*. Presumably the forces of the *doux* of Dyrrachion, who melted away before they came in contact with the Hungarians, were locals, and they returned to their homes. The other alternative is that they were sent by the central authority, and decided to forsake employment with the emperor. But Kinnamos' narrative implies that these were not deserters. They were locals who returned home rather than risk their lives fighting the Hungarians. When Michael Gabras was sent to attack Amaseia, as a diversionary attack during the second Ikonion campaign of 1176. Gabras took part of his army with him, but the rest he gathered from the villages near Trebizond and Oinaion.¹²⁷

Kinnamos reports that Manuel prepared carefully for his campaign of 1176: horses and men were supplied, and oxen were brought in from the villages in Thrace; more than three thousand wagons were gathered.¹²⁸ This is an important passage; it is the only mention our sources provide of precise numbers of wagons to support an army of between thirty thousand and forty thousand combatants. If, for the sake of argument, we assume that the allied contingents such as the Antiochenes supplied themselves, this gives us a proportion of wagons to men that would roughly agree with what a file or two of infantry, ten to twelve men, would require.¹²⁹ This is not an indication of organizational continuity with the prescriptions of earlier military texts; rather it suggests that a military wagon was capable of carrying the supplies necessary for roughly this number of men. This passage also mirrors Kinnamos' mention of a tremendous quantity of oxen being driven from Thrace to supply an army that Manuel planned to direct against Ikonion in 1160.¹³⁰ Kinnamos'

¹²⁷ Kinnamos, 293, ll. 9–16.

¹²⁸ Kinnamos, 299, ll. 15–17.

¹²⁹ *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. John Haldon (Vienna, 1990), 118–19. The ten wagons for one hundred soldiers of the *hetairia* is probably a maximum; one would expect the average soldier to be less well equipped and provided for.

¹³⁰ Kinnamos, 199. An interesting side-note to this campaign is that John Komnenos encountered a Turkish army of 22,000 men, and defeated them, with only a part of the imperial force that Manuel had mustered that year. These 22,000 men, and the example of the 24,000 that Choniates mentions invading the Maiander valley after the 1176 campaign, offer a good benchmark for the fighting strength of a Turkish army. It is clear the emperor had far more men at Myriokephalon, and the Turkish force was correspondingly larger. In the Maiander campaign, the 24,000 man Turkish force is represented as the elite of the Turkish army. These

third mention of army supply occurs during his account of the emperor's 1150 campaign against the Hungarians. The Byzantine contingent included a specific corps of men who marched with the army, and who searched for food supplies (in this case food hidden underground,) that they dug up with mattocks.¹³¹ Mention of professional foragers is extremely rare in most military accounts and foragers do not appear (to my knowledge) in any other Byzantine source for the Komnenian period. In this context, they are mentioned with the specific intent of elucidating one of Manuel's tactical stratagems. Nevertheless, it is a good finishing point for a discussion of literary evidence for military support institutions. There is so little direct evidence for organization of this sort during the Komnenian period that we must be careful not to make assumptions about the existence of sophisticated mechanisms for supplying and supporting the army, both on and off campaign. Despite fragmentary evidence, the above examples indicate that the Komnenoi developed a sophisticated system for maintaining their troops, and that supply before and during campaign was regularized. We should see the Komnenian emphasis on fortification and sieges as an example of the importance of advanced posts in supplying medieval armies.

were probably the sultan's own men, rather than those he could call upon from allied tribes and his amirs.

¹³¹ Kinnamos, 106.

CHAPTER SEVEN

KOMNENIAN SIEGE WARFARE

This chapter examines the practice of siegecraft under the Komnenian emperors. Most of our siege examples date from the reigns of John and Manuel, for Alexios initiated few sieges; he was too busy defending his fractured empire to engage in wars of conquest. Yet, from the commencement of John II's reign (1118) until the end of Manuel's reign (1180), sieges and the defense of strategic cities formed the most important element of Byzantine war planning and strategic thought. The chroniclers mention a few field battles fought by John II Komnenos. Theodore Prodromos even says to John, in an oration on the capture of Kastamon, that he did not fight in open battle, but instead chose to smash through walls.¹ Choniates mentions twenty six-separate incidents where one of John's campaigns involved siege actions, and three instances where John fortified previously undefended locations. This averages over one siege a year, and there may have been many other actions in which the emperor did not participate, and that our sources neglect to mention. Manuel I also conducted many sieges. Byzantine forces attacked or defended approximately two dozen strong places during the thirty-seven years of Manuel's reign, while Manuel ordered fortifications constructed at ten locations. These were not random actions. In the following pages we will examine the purposes of Komnenian siege warfare, the regions and cities upon which John and Manuel focused their attention, and the siege techniques and equipment they employed.

Alexios I

Komnenian military policy emphasized aggressive siege-warfare followed by tenacious defense. These two elements were separate tactical functions, but they were indivisible parts of a strategy of controlling

cities in order to control the surrounding regions. Alexios' campaigns were usually defensive in nature; he and his agents conducted few sieges, but instead defended Byzantine cities and fortified places against Normans, Pechenegs, and Seljuk Turks.² Alexios' successful defense of Epiros and the empire's Balkan territories enabled John and Manuel to pursue aggressive military policies.

The importance of successful siege actions cannot be overestimated. For example, Robert Guiscard's defeat of the Byzantine army at Dyrrachion (1081) was less significant than his failures in siege actions; Dyrrachion was captured at great cost to the Norman army, and Guiscard's unsuccessful attempt to seize the fortifications of Epiros slowed his army's march to Thessalonike. These lost opportunities meant that the Normans were never able to establish permanent control over Epiros, Thessaly, and Macedonia. Their control remained limited to the littoral of the Ionian Sea. George Palaiologos' defense of Dyrrachion, and the presence of substantial fortifications at Kastoria and in Epiros were more effective than the imperial army at preventing the Normans from advancing into the Byzantine heartland. Fortifications were man-made geographical and strategic impediments; a reasonably effective army could prevent an enemy from conducting a siege, but an enemy could not consolidate his control over a region without taking the cities. Fortifications were a delaying measure. In most long campaigns, the side that could remain in the field the longest won. Successful sieges thus provided an attacker with a method for quickly obtaining control over a region, while a successful defense frequently created insurmountable obstacles for an enemy army trying to survive in a hostile country.

Byzantine literary sources are curiously indifferent to accounts of sieges and siege-craft, except when an imperial personage is involved.³ Byzantine oratorical sources (the panygerics and orations of Prodromos and Basilakes as opposed to the historians), provide some information about sieges, but such information is sporadic and highly

² It should be noted that the history of Asia Minor might have developed very differently if Melissenos and the other late eleventh-century usurpers had not turned over the impregnable Byzantine fortified cities of Asia Minor to the Seljuk Turkish mercenaries that accompanied them.

³ Niketas Choniates, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. Van Dieten, CFHB (Berlin, 1975) Gangra, (Choniates, 20-21); Kerkyra (Choniates, 87), and Syria (Choniates 27-31) are exceptions to this rule: in each case the emperor was present (at Gangra, both John and Manuel), which accounts for the wealth of useful detail.

¹ *Theodoros Prodromos Historische Gedichte*, ed. Wolfram Hörandner, Wiener Byz. Studien 11 (Vienna, 1974), 195, ll. 65-8.

variable in quality.⁴ It can be argued that Anna Komnene's indifference to siege actions perhaps stems from a lack of knowledge of siegecraft. More likely, Anna had little interest in activities that did not directly demonstrate Alexios' prowess. When Alexios was present during a siege—for example when he personally besieged the Norman garrison at Kastoria (1083)—she provides a wealth of detail.⁵ When Alexios was himself ignominiously besieged by the Pechenegs at Tzouroulos in eastern Thrace, Anna seems to have felt compelled to invent a demonstration of his cleverness. Since Alexios was militarily indistinguishable from the other commanders who were also bottled up in the fort, she highlighted his intelligence; his use of a clever gimmick supposedly enabled the Byzantines to prevail in circumstances that were otherwise humiliating.⁶

In other situations that involved specialized Byzantine siege troops, such as the progress of the First Crusade through Asia Minor, Anna is careful to delineate the Byzantine role: to provide guides, and engineers for siege actions. These men also transported the siege equipment and constructed the engines when a siege was necessary.⁷ Alexios did not accompany the Crusaders beyond Nicaea, where he participated in the siege action. He negotiated the submission of the city to the empire; the Turkish defenders preferred to negotiate with Alexios, rather than with the Crusaders. This was also the occasion of the first serious disagreement between Alexios and the Crusaders. Alexios sought to reconstitute the Byzantine frontier in western Asia Minor, while the Crusaders sought restitution (either in money or in booty) for their difficulties so far. Naturally, Alexios did not want the Crusaders to sack a city that had been Byzantine ten years ear-

⁴ Theodore Prodromos produced orations celebrating John II's battles at Kastamon and Gangra (1133–34). His third oration describes the capture of Laodicea and Sozopolis, Kastamon, Alamos, Algos, and Balzon. The fourth and fifth orations are descriptions of John's triumphs in Constantinople: they mention (in the fourth oration) victories over the Scythians (Pechenegs), the Dalmatians (Serbs), at Amorion and at Lemnos; the fifth oration also mentions a victory over the Dacians (probably the Hungarians). Orations six and eight describe triumphal processions, and John's second capture of Kastamon, respectively.

⁵ *Alexiade*, 41–42. (VII, 1).

⁶ *Alexiade*, 123–24. (VII, 11).

⁷ Denis Sullivan, ed. *Siegecraft: two tenth-century instruction manuals by "Heron of Byzantium"* (Washington, 2000), p. 18. Sullivan notes that Anna Komnene's description of a wide variety of siege engines (*Alexiade* XI: 1: 6–7, XIII 2:3, 3:9) may have been a function of the literary influence of earlier texts.

lier, that was inhabited by Greeks, and that would provide an anchor for further Byzantine acquisitions in western Anatolia. Nicaea passed into Byzantine hands and became the most important Byzantine city in Asia Minor.

John II and Manuel I

John II and Manuel I inherited a stable political situation and a professional army.⁸ Both emperors pursued active military policies, and both deployed considerable resources both on sieges and on city defenses.⁹ A cursory examination of John and Manuel's siege actions reveals the following: John conducted seven siege actions in Paphlagonia or Pontos (northern Asia Minor), six in Pamphylia or Cilicia (southern Asia Minor), and five siege actions in Syria. Manuel or his generals conducted sieges in Pamphylia (one siege), attempted to besiege Ikonion in east-central Asia Minor (twice), besieged Kerkyra, off the coast of Epiros, besieged Brindisi in Italy, successfully attacked Zeugminon, on the Hungarian frontier, and attacked Damietta, on the mouth of the Nile in Egypt. Manuel also built fortifications; Zeugminon, Chilara, Pergamon, and Atramyttion in the new theme of Neokastra; and Dorylaion and Soublaion in preparation for the 1176 attack upon Ikonion. Byzantine cities also defended themselves many times during Manuel's reign: Monemvasia, Thebes, and Corinth against Norman attacks; Zeugminon against the Hungarians; Laodicea against the Turks; Tralles, Antioch in Pisidia, Louma, and Pentachair (unsuccessfully) against Turkish attacks at the end of Manuel's reign. Orators also mention places the emperors attacked, but that are not mentioned in our historical sources. For example, in his fourth oration on John Komnenos, Theodore Prodromos mentions John's victories at Amorion and Lemnos.¹⁰

⁸ Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris, 1990). Alexios faced rebellions during twenty years of his thirty-seven-year reign. During John's reign of twenty-five years, only two years were marked by rebellions. The only serious rebellion during Manuel's thirty-seven-year reign was that of Andronikos Komnenos, but plots surfaced during ten of those years.

⁹ Clive Foss and David Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications: An Introduction* (Pretoria, 1986). See 145–50 for techniques of construction. See 56–59 for John and Manuel's defensive works.

¹⁰ Prodromos, 208. John celebrates a triumph in Constantinople for his victories against the Scythians (Pechenegs), Dalmatians (Serbians), Dacians (Hungarians) and

John and Manuel's sieges, as well as their fortification programs, were grouped in distinct regions. John seldom campaigned in Europe. His efforts were directed at reinforcing the empire's frontiers in Cilicia, Paphlagonia, and Pontos. During John's reign the Seljuk Sultanate of Ikonion was not a threat to Byzantine control of the western river-valleys and the southern coastline. The Seljuks became a serious problem only during Manuel's reign. Manuel's fortification and siege efforts were more geographically varied than John II's. His generals conducted sieges in Italy, and he financed the rebuilding of Milan's walls after the emperor Frederick I Barbarossa destroyed them (1167). The emperor's military efforts included attempts to create a stable frontier with Hungary, several attempts to control Cilicia, including Antioch, and a fortification program aimed at developing stable Byzantine provinces in the western end of the Anatolian peninsula (1162-3). In order to accomplish this latter goal, Manuel fortified cities in the provinces of Neokastra, Thrakesion, and Maiander.¹¹ He also pursued aggressive fortification projects at Dorylaion and Soublaion (1175) in preparation for his 1176 campaign against the Seljuks of Ikonion.¹² These were aggressive actions: the creation of fortified outposts and supply-points right on the empire's border with the Seljuk Turks. Manuel's siege of Kerkyra, and his defensive actions in Hellas were not part of a deliberate policy, but were reactions to the aggressive military strategy of Roger II of Sicily. In this context, we should interpret the Byzantine attack upon Italy as a defensive action; it was calculated to prevent a repeat of the Norman raids of 1154-55.

Siege actions, aggressive fortification policies, and defensively motivated invasions were therefore at the heart of imperial military policy during John and Manuel's reigns. Alexios fought field battles because he was forced to defend the empire against constant Norman and Turkish attacks. Domestic stability during John and Manuel's reigns allowed the formation of a military policy; John and Manuel recognized the value of fortification in preserving and extending the imperial border. An examination of John and Manuel's field battles

Kastamon, and beyond the Halys River. 208-9. Prodromos also mentions victories at Amorion and Lemnos (the one on land, the second a naval victory), and these are not mentioned in other sources. Finally, victories are mentioned at Alamos, Alzos, Balzon, p. 194.

¹¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 150.

¹² Choniates, *Historia*, 176.

(as opposed to sieges) indicates that the only decisive battles were John's victory over an army of Pecheneg marauders (1122), his defeat of an Hungarian invasion (1127), and Manuel's victory over the Hungarians at the battle of Semlin (1167). These victories preserved imperial control of Bulgaria, Dalmatia, and Serbia between 1122 and 1180. Myriokephalon was also a decisive battle; it prevented any serious Byzantine offensives in Asia Minor, but it did not cause significant changes to the empire's eastern boundaries. Manuel immediately repudiated the peace treaty he was forced to accept because of his defeat. Both John and Manuel understood that large field battles seldom accomplished ambitious, long-term policy goals such as the extension of a military frontier. No battle during John and Manuel's reigns, even the three successful, decisive victories mentioned above, resulted in great territorial changes. It was taking and holding fortified places that extended the imperial frontier.

Manuel's last campaign, which resulted in the Byzantine defeat at Myriokephalon, was directed against Ikonion. It should be understood as an accidental field battle that resulted from an abortive siege action. The huge army that Manuel gathered for this campaign existed for two reasons: first, to bring the siege train to Ikonion, and second, to prosecute the siege at the Seljuk capital. A major battle was neither desired nor sought. Indeed, the emperor's attempt to bring his army through the Myriokephalon passes without fighting the Turks was one of the causes of the Byzantine's defeat. The tactical mistakes that resulted in the defeat at Myriokephalon, however, are not important to the strategic significance of this campaign. Had the army reached Ikonion intact, Manuel planned to take the city. A successful siege action at Ikonion would have critically altered the Byzantine military position in Anatolia. Whatever Manuel's tactical mistakes in this campaign, his strategic vision and his decision to attack Ikonion were clear and correct in light of his goal: obtaining permanent control over the southern coast of Asia Minor, and eventually over Antioch.¹³

¹³ Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos* (Cambridge, 1993), 96, 125-132. Magdalino discusses both Manuel's fortification policy and the campaign of Ikonion with respect to the Latin Crusader states and the West, comparing this last campaign to a crusade. To this analysis of Manuel's motives should be added the pure military calculation discussed above: taking Ikonion was well within the capacity of the army Manuel mustered.

The Textual Evidence

Niketas Choniates and John Kinnamos enumerate the most important military events of John II Komnenos' reign before describing in greater detail the campaigns and conquests of Manuel I Komnenos. Their accounts of John's reign describe nearly a siege a year. Because of the skeletal account they provide, we can assume, but not prove, that other siege actions occurred but were not recorded in their pages. (See Appendix 1.) Nevertheless, their lists provide a map of Byzantine strategic priorities under these two emperors: their activities were usually conducted in specific zones, which correspond to the political policy emphases of each emperor's reign.

Although this information is useful when analyzing the policy priorities of the two emperors, Choniates and Kinnamos were no more interested in the military activities of non-emperors than Anna Komnene. However, these two later historians were still in a much better position to obtain accurate information than Anna. They wrote after John died, but unlike Anna, they were not describing events that had occurred fifty years earlier. Anna claimed to have used the descriptions of veterans but was never an eyewitness to the military events she describes. Choniates and Kinnamos were not sequestered in a monastery, as Anna was after her abortive rebellion against John II. Choniates and Kinnamos, on the other hand, would have been more likely to meet people who had information about John and Manuel's campaigns than Anna, whose monastic exile lasted for the entirety of John and Manuel's reigns.

Nevertheless, Anna Komnene's descriptive vocabulary is remarkably consistent when she describes siege implements.¹⁴ In the ancient Greek and Hellenistic world, the *helepolis* was a siege tower, used to give soldiers an advantage in height when assaulting otherwise formidable city or fortress defenses. However, in the *Alexiad*, (and in contemporaneous Byzantine sources), the *helepolis* is an entirely different sort of engine: a trebuchet.¹⁵ The *helepolis* was the largest Byzantine siege engine. The *petroboloi* and *lithoboloi* were, respectively, machines of medium and small size. *Lithoboloi* were small enough to mount on the walls of fortifications, although the walls of Constan-

¹⁴ G.T. Dennis, 'Byzantine Heavy Artillery: The Helepolis,' *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 39 (1998), 103.
¹⁵ G.T. Dennis, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 39 (1998), 108–110.

tinople were perhaps unique in having towers capable of handling the shock-force of the counter-weight of the larger, weighted stone-throwing trebuchets. In Choniates and Kinnamos the terms *petrobolos* and *lithobolos* continue to be used. Comparative assessments of siege implements during Alexios, John, and Manuel's reigns are made difficult by terminological variations among the chroniclers. Anna may refer to torsion or counterweight artillery by the terms *helepolis*, and it may be clear which kind of machine she refers to, but Kinnamos employs more generic terminology, and even with Choniates' greater precision, he usually refers to an engine as an *helepolis*, regardless of its size or the stones it was meant to launch. It is difficult to know whether equivalent terms in Choniates and Kinnamos reflect descriptions of the same engines or other types, apart from observing the context in which the engines are used, and attempting to gauge their size by how they were used, and by their effectiveness.

For example, in 1130 John II conducted an expedition against Kastamon. This city was taken after extensive preparations, including surrounding the city with siege engines. In 1134–35 John again took Kastamon, exciting the praise of Theodore Prodromos, who describes how the emperor personally took a "rough" (*trechea*) stone and placed it in the "wall-crushing" (*olesiteicho*) sling. Then he orders the "illustrious men" (*andras agauous*), the artillerymen, also called the stone-shakers (*lithopalmonas*), to hit their target.¹⁶ Prodromos then describes how the stone made a whistling sound and fell into the middle of the city. It appears clear from the context that the passage not only praises the skill of the artillerymen, but is intended as well to illustrate the physical strength of the emperor. Presumably, the audience understood that this feat, as well as the engine's accuracy, was exceptional. Prodromos continues, describing how the rain of stones caused the Turks to surrender the city.

After Kastamon, John directed his army against the city of Gangra, which also capitulated as a result of the effectiveness of his trebuchets.¹⁷ A year later the emperor campaigned in Cilicia, attacking

¹⁶ Prodromos, ed. Hörandner, 239.

¹⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 20–21. Prodromos says, "men stood around [the city] on all sides, stone throwing engines here and there, a marvel to see. Very many were set up that it formed another sort of wall on the outside." 239. (Trans. E. Kurtz. *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 16 [1907], 76–83).

the Armenian fortress of Anazarbos. In this instance the defenders also possessed siege engines, which they used both against imperial soldiers and in counter-battery fire against the imperial engines. Choniates describes Anazarbos as a "densely populated city, embraced by strong walls . . . and defended by ramparts and diverse engines of war [*mechanais pantoiais*] stationed at intervals."¹⁸ The defensive fire consisted of round stones launched against the imperial infantry, and heated iron pellets shot against the engines. These measures initially overwhelmed John's own trebuchets. The Armenians were so emboldened by their success that they launched several sorties and burned several Byzantine engines, which were protected by reed-covered scaffolds. Despite this success, the imperial artillerymen were able to repair the engines, which John then protected with ramparts of brick. When the Armenians attempted to hit these engines, (which Choniates says they repeatedly did), their efforts had no effect. The fire-pellets hit the brick breastworks around the engines and the trebuchets remained unscathed.

Several aspects of this detailed description deserve closer analysis. First, the conduct of this campaign is remarkably similar to Manuel's siege of the citadel of Kerkira in 1147. During this siege, the approach of the Venetian and Byzantine fleets caused the Norman defenders to distribute archers and siege engines around the walls. These were used to attack the imperial soldiers at the earliest opportunity. Choniates describes the missiles fired as "javelins" (*velemina*) and stones. But the reference to javelins is rhetorical, and should not be construed to indicate that the Byzantines or their foes were using Roman-style *ballistae*. Choniates says that the Byzantines gathered the stones fired by the city's engines, and fired them back at the enemy.¹⁹ The defenders' higher elevation allowed their missiles to fire more effectively than those of the emperor. The imperial general, Stephanos Kontostephanos was killed by a fragment of a stone fired from one of the defenders' engines, which struck the siege engine that Stephanos was directing; he was spattered by a shrapnel of wood-fragments from the shattered engine. The siege lasted from autumn 1148 until July or August of 1149.²⁰ The fortress was eventually starved into

¹⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, p. 25. (Trans. H. Magoulas, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* [Detroit, 1984], 15).

¹⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 78.

²⁰ Choniates, *Historia*, 78-79, 88.

submission. The position of the citadel, and the difficulty of fully using trebuchets against an enemy that held a higher position meant that the trebuchets were unable to decide the battle.

Both defenders and besiegers employed stone throwers that appear comparable in force and power. Choniates remarks that it was the height of the defenders' citadel that rendered the imperial engines ineffective, not the power of the defenders' siege engines. Although the engines at Kerkira were undoubtedly positioned behind the walls, and fired over them, Constantinople had towers large enough to support very large stone-throwing engines. Choniates reports that the Armenians at Anazarbos stationed engines around the walls. Whether these engines were within the fortress or on the towers, the defenders were skilled, and they repeatedly struck the imperial trebuchets. At Kerkira, neither Kontostephanos nor Manuel repeated John's counter-measures by protecting the siege engines with bunkers of brick earthworks. The sources do not in any event mention such measures; perhaps the height advantage of the Norman garrison would have rendered such measures useless. Both accounts mention round stones thrown by both the attackers and the defenders. At Anazarbos the defenders shot round stones at the attacking infantry. It may be that these stones shattered upon impact, or, as Kinnamos' report implies, that wooden objects struck by one of these stones shot fragments in all directions.²¹ Furthermore, the heated iron pellets that Choniates mentions several times were not fired at the infantry; they apparently were used exclusively against opposing trebuchets.

The accuracy of these machines and the crews manning them is further attested by the siege action at Gangra in 1135. The Byzantines set up their engines and directed the artillerymen to repeatedly strike at the houses inside the city, since the walls were too strong.²² At Zeugminon, Andronikos Kontostephanos personally operated a trebuchet to shoot a stone at a wooden gallery that was filled with Hungarian soldiers who were waving their weapons and shouting obscenities.²³ These examples indicate several possibilities. First, the degree of skill possessed by the artillerymen must have been considerable to enable them to accomplish such a task. Choniates does

²¹ John Kinnamos, *Ioannis Cinnami, Epitomi*, ed A. Meineke (Bonn, 1836), p. 97.

²² Choniates, *Historia*, 20-21.

²³ Choniates, *Historia*, 134.

not indicate that this level of skill was exceptional, and we can assume that the artillerymen were a corps of specialists—indeed, they must have been an elite. Second, these accounts of *helepoloi* indicate that the weapons were able to fire with a relatively shallow trajectory. Most discussions of trebuchets have assumed that these stone-throwers tossed missiles on a very high arc,—as is indicated by Komnenian accounts of stones being arched over walls to crush the houses within. But *helepoli* were also used to strike the walls themselves, as well as gates, which were frequently recessed and protected by overhanging parapets. The only kind of fire that could strike these targets would have been a flat trajectory. Trebuchets seem to have been very versatile weapons, indeed, capable of attacking any target within a city (such as Gangra), and of shattering the foundations of formidable walls (such as Zeugminon).²⁴

Other examples of the decisive effects of stone-throwing engines abound. Choniates notes that at Pisa, in Syria, the “hail of stones” demolished many of the towers.²⁵ Kinnamos notes that when the Byzantine army approached Taranto, in the course of Manuel’s Italian campaign, it was unable to besiege the city because it lacked a sufficient number of siege engines. These examples suggest that both besieging armies and the cities they attacked had extensive experience with siege warfare. They had stores of rounded rocks and pellets with which to fire in assault or defense. They had highly trained crews who knew the capabilities of their finely tuned machines. These machines were complex, too complex to be constructed from scratch on the spot, and it would have been difficult for besieged cities to obtain the timber to construct the trebuchets after attackers arrived, much less to build and test them. This is particularly the case since so many of John and Manuel’s sieges were conducted at the end of sudden raids. These engines were constructed beforehand, and were carefully conserved until needed, both by defending cities and by imperial armies.

A further example of siege engine technology is provided by Choniates when he describes the siege the emperor conducted against Zeugminon, a Hungarian fortress on the Danube River, during the summer of 1165. Choniates describes the defense of this fortified

²⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 20, 244.

²⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 27.

position: “Instead, they barred all the entrances and strengthened the walls with diverse weapons and stone-throwing engines [*organoi*].”²⁶ In addition to importuning the emperor with screamed obscenities (an act that aroused Choniates’ considerable indignation), the defenders fired various missiles at the Byzantines. Choniates reports that the Byzantines filled the moat that surrounded the city so that the imperial siege engines (*petrobolos mechanas*) could approach, an apparently successful manoeuvre, since Choniates next mentions that the Byzantines undermined the Hungarians’ walls, prying apart the stones of the foundation, and smashed them with stones from siege engines.²⁷ Choniates describes the function of one of these engines: it threw stones of a *talent* weight, and was controlled by use of a sling, winch, and rod (*sphendone, strophalon, lygos*).²⁸ This engine, which was apparently typical of those surrounding Zeugminon, shattered the walls of the city. Again, we find evidence of the skill of the artilleryman: the concentrated fire of many trebuchets soon smashed a hole in the wall. When some Hungarian nobles took positions on wooden upperworks upon the walls, an engine took aim and struck the framework upon which they stood, sending them to their deaths.²⁹

The only kind of engine with this sort of wall-destroying power, as well as accuracy, is the trebuchet. Engines are explicitly mentioned in accounts of nearly all Komnenian sieges, and the chroniclers seem to have assumed that their appearance would serve to decide the battle. Only when the topography worked against the attackers’ advantage (as was true at Kerkyra, where the engines were forced to fire uphill), do they appear ineffective.

A description of a trebuchet appears as early as the late sixth or early seventh century in the *Strategikon* of the emperor Maurice (582–602). The text initially appeared to envision a fighting platform with some form of classical ballistae mounted upon it. A re-examination

²⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 133.

²⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 134.

²⁸ Choniates, *Historia*, 134. These three objects seem to indicate that the machine could only have been a trebuchet. See also: Dennis, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 39 (1998), 99–115. This is the best short survey of the Byzantine sources for the development of the trebuchet, and for evidence that this engine existed as far back as the late sixth century. See also P.E. Cheveddin, “The Invention of the Counterweight Trebuchet,” DOP 54, and Cheveddin, “The Hybrid Trebuchet: The Halfway Step to the Counterweight Trebuchet,” in *On the Social Origins of Medieval Institutions*, ed. Kagay and Vann, Brill (Leiden, 1998), 179–222.

²⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 134.

of the Greek indicates the movement was not the sweeping horizontal movement of aimed classical ballistae, but the vertical sweep of a trebuchet. The Greek indicates that there is movement at both ends of the machine, which can neither refer to a ballista, nor to the classical torsion catapult, the Onager.³⁰

Despite all of this evidence for the importance of trebuchets and stone-throwing engines, and although this form of warfare was characteristic of the Komnenian military strategy, it was not the defining aspect of siege warfare in earlier Byzantine practice. Nikephoros Ouranos, in the *Taktika* (ca. 999–1011), describes in great detail the use of mining and tunneling to destroy wall sections of an enemy fortress. He fully expects that the enemy will attempt to dig counter-tunnels, and he then cautions that despite the usefulness of rams, towers, and ladders, “the more effective way, one the enemy cannot match, is undermining the foundations.”³¹ This passage is also interesting for what it omits; the *Taktika* contains only a single mention of *manganikon*, which Eric McGeer translates as “trebuchets”; these are used in an auxiliary role—to attack both the walls and the men upon them. In this context, they could be any kind of stone-throwing engine. Certainly, Ouranos does not consider them to have had a decisive effect. If they were trebuchets, they must have been inferior in power and effectiveness to the engines that the Komnenian armies had at their disposal. The *Taktika* considers sapping (tunneling) the most effective siege strategy. If trebuchets were used, it was not because their power enabled them to seize cities any more quickly than tunneling; some of the Komnenian sieges of John II lasted over a month (Anazarbos). It appears reasonable to suppose that the increased use of siege engines during the Komnenian period, and in the period immediately preceding, was due to technological innovations, perhaps the adoption of the counterweight, which enabled the Komnenian trebuchets to be effective enough to supplant methods in use two centuries before.³² In the context of these two exam-

³⁰ Dennis, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 39 (1998), 99–100.

³¹ Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, 1995), 161. See also Sullivan, *Siegecraft*, 38–41.

³² Paul E. Chevedden, in *On the Social Origins of Medieval Institutions* (Leiden, [1998]), 203–4, notes a number of descriptions of trebuchet use (under the name of *baban*) from Arabic or eastern sources: Romanos IV besieged Manbij in 1068 with trebuchets, Alp Arslan besieged Edessa in 1071 for fifty days, John II besieged Anazarbos for thirty-seven days, and Toghril Beg besieged Manzikert in 1054. In this case

ples, of warfare in the tenth century and in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it is also reasonable to suppose that the *petroboloi*, *mangana*, and even the *ballistae*³³ represented stone-throwing engines of an earlier, less effective sort than the engines mentioned in Byzantine and Arabic sources from the eleventh century onward.

Siege technology accounted for more substantial victories than the few field battles fought by the Komnenian emperors. Byzantine gains in western Asia Minor were secured by fortifications at Atramyttion, Pergamon, and Rhyndakos, as well as fortified cities such as Laodikeia, Chonae, and Tralleis, and fortified points such as Soublaion and Dorylaeon. While John's campaigns against Kastamon and Gangra did not obtain lasting control over large areas of territory, these campaigns were similar to Manuel's campaigns in Italy—they prevented the empire's enemies from taking aggressive actions against Byzantine territory and forced the Seljuks and Danishmendids to expend considerable resources in re-taking these cities, rather than mounting invasions of more important Byzantine territories. John and Manuel's operations in Cilicia did not reconstitute this region as a stable Byzantine province, but they did enable the Byzantines to control the coastal regions, including the all-important fortified city of Seleukeia; as a result, the Byzantines maintained their outpost on Cyprus, and they continued to influence the Crusader states. Equally, the Byzantine losses in the Italian campaign were disastrous not so much because of the army's defeat in any one battle, but because of the loss (at considerable human and financial cost) of important fortified points to the Normans. The possession of these fortified cities would have forced the Normans to remain in Italy, attempting to besiege them, rather than interfering with Byzantine operations in the Balkans.

Historians tend to assume that fortifications impregnable, and perhaps influenced by the chroniclers, regard the taking of a fortress or

the weight of the stones thrown by the trebuchets ranged from 111 to 200 kilograms (p. 187). This trebuchet itself apparently is calculated to have weighed between 1875 and 2250 kilograms, according to Armenian sources (the total probably includes some form of counter-weight, although the sources mention the use of a rather large crew of four hundred men to pull the arm to its “cocked” position).

³³ Dennis, *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, 423. The *ballistras*, are most probably trebuchets, since they are described as *ballistras hekaterothen strephomenas*, which means a trebuchet, or a stone-thrower in which both ends revolve on a pivot when the stone is propelled toward its target. The artillerymen are called *ballistrarios*.

a city as an unusual event. This is more a function of western European historical treatment of siegecraft.³⁴ The Byzantines possessed sophisticated techniques for taking cities; the Crusaders were forced to rely upon this ability in their siege at Nicaea, where they presumably received advice from the Byzantine officer Tatikios, who served with the First Crusade until the Crusader army's situation at Antioch became desperate. The list of sieges in Appendix 1, although incomplete, gives some indication of the frequency of siege actions: there were thirty-one sieges conducted during the reigns of Manuel and John, according to Choniates and Kinnamos. John and Manuel fortified twelve major locations, while imperial forces defended themselves against siege actions on ten occasions (not including the Turkish sack of five Byzantine cities after Myriokephalon).

Effects of Byzantine Defensive Operations

What did this offensive siegecraft and defensive building program do for the Byzantine strategic position in Asia Minor? The successful defense of western Asia Minor resulted in considerable prosperity; when John Vatatzes was sent from Constantinople in 1177 to repel a Turkish invasion, he not only brought troops from the capital but also was able to gather an army along the way.³⁵ Furthermore, the "eastern divisions" mentioned at Myriokephalon emerged unscathed by the defeat. They must have been numerous, a substantial percentage of the entire army, since they comprised one of the major marching divisions (which consisted of a van, the left and right flanks, the troops with the emperor, and the rear-guard). There

³⁴ C. Oman, *The Art of War in the Middle Ages*, ed. & rev. John H. Beeler (Ithaca, NY 1990), esp. p. 68. Oman says, "Against walls fifteen to thirty feet thick, the feeble siege artillery of the day—*perrières*, catapults, and trebuchets,—beat without perceptible effect. A Norman keep . . . had an almost endless capacity for passive resistance." Needless to say, our sources do not support this conclusion.

³⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 192–93. Vatatzes was joined by Constantine Doukas and Michael Aspietes. They ambushed and destroyed the Turkish force on the Maian-der, near the fortresses of Hyelion and Leimocheir, but not until after the Turks had sacked Tralles, Phrygian Antioch, Louma, and Pentacheir, as well as some other fortresses. This invasion appears to have been the only major effect of Manuel's defeat at Myriokephalon. The emperor refused to demolish the fortress of Dorylaion, as required by his peace treaty, and we may assume that the Byzantines retained this important stronghold.

is no reason to suppose that they numbered much less than the western divisions, which provided up to six thousand cavalry for the Byzantine army in the civil wars (1071–81), and undoubtedly more in the period of internal peace which began with Bohemond's defeat in 1106. The large Komnenian armies that were mustered for the subsequent Pecheneg, (1122) Cilician, (1136–39) Hungarian, (1167) and Turkish (1176) campaigns were made possible by peace within the empire, maintained by a substantial fortification program that provided the security and stability necessary for economic growth. This program should be examined alongside the Byzantine policy of settling defeated barbarians in threatened areas. The Pechenegs of Moglena were settled on the invasion route from Serbia and Hungary into Macedonia, while the Serbians settled at Nicomedia were conveniently placed to be mustered north to defend Kastamon, or south, to defend the Neokastra region. The purpose of fortifications was thus both to protect important cities and to provide time for imperial forces (including the settled barbarian populations) to gather and repel an invasion (as was done when the Turks invaded in 1177). Fortresses supplanted the old geographical barriers, the east Anatolian mountain and fortified passes that the Byzantines had relied upon to protect the empire during the tenth century. The strategic innovation of the Komnenian emperors was their heavy reliance on such man-made obstacles.

Protection of Siege Trains

The most important reason for the Byzantine defeat at Myriokephalon was that the baggage train was caught in the center of the army, and prevented the five parts of the army from supporting one another. The siege train was included in this baggage,³⁶ and the siege engines were the most vulnerable and also the most important part of the baggage train of a medieval army. Trebuchets in the army of Romanos IV Diogenes during the Manzikert campaign (1068–71) each required a hundred carts and twelve-hundred men to transport.³⁷ Manuel kept his treasure-chests with the baggage train, together with the soldiers'

³⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 180.

³⁷ Chevedden, *The Hybrid Trebuchet*, 188. When Manuel was planning his 1176 expedition, which ended ignominiously at Myriokephalon, he ordered three thousand

provisions of food and water, and the supplies for the army's horses. Despite extensive baggage and supply trains, medieval armies always foraged and raided for supplies when traveling through hostile territories. As several recent studies of pre-modern armies have noted, it was impossible for large armies to transport sufficient fodder and food for both horse and man.³⁸ The amount of fodder required by horses and oxen soon exceeds the amount they can carry. What, then, was the use of the three thousand wagons Manuel ordered brought from Thrace? Moreover, what was the purpose of the countless oxen ordered from Thrace for the Myriokephalon campaign?³⁹ These questions are particularly apt in the context of this campaign, since Choniates' narrative makes it clear that the Byzantines relied almost entirely upon the provinces through which they traveled (Byzantine or Turkish) for their provisioning.

Of course, the baggage also contained many things other than food, treasure, and siege engines. Constantine Porphyrogenitus' "What Should Be Observed When the Great and High Emperor of the Romans Goes On Campaign," describes the many things that the emperor required when on campaign.⁴⁰ These myriad items combined to make little less than a mobile imperial palace, which contained civil as well as military officials. Imperial government did not cease when the emperor went on campaign; it was conducted from

wagons brought from Thrace. If these were used only to transport trebuchets, thirty of these machines could have been transported with three thousand wagons.

³⁸ See David W. Engels, *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army* (Los Angeles, 1978). This work makes several methodological assumptions, relying upon World War I transport data and transposing them to the army of Alexander for purposes of analyzing an ancient army's carrying capacities. Nevertheless, it is a useful study for anyone interested in comparing source descriptions of army sizes with the practical reality that armies above a certain size were too large to transport enough foodstuffs to keep themselves fed. Manuel's army at Myriokephalon was likely the maximum size possible for an army fielded by an organized medieval state that was unwilling to impose the burden of foraging upon its own population. In other words, Manuel's army could only supply itself with its own transported food and water for a few days' time. The Seljuk policy of destroying wells and forage seriously damaged Manuel's army.

³⁹ Kinnamos, 299.

⁴⁰ John F. Haldon, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: Three Treatises On Imperial Military Expeditions* (Vienna, 1990) 119. "For the household service 80 pack-animals, 62 pack-horses; for the imperial tent 50 pack-animals, 43 pack-horses; for the personal imperial *vestiarion* 30 pack-animals, 15 pack-horses; for the *eidikon* 40 pack animals, and 15 pack-horses." The list continues. The total is 1086 pack animals and packhorses, and 30 riding horses, and this was just for the emperor's personal entourage and personal guards.

wherever he was situated. But these luxuries, despite their opulence, must have taken up little space compared with dozens of disassembled siege engines, particularly the trebuchets. Unfortunately, we do not know how many wagons were required to transport an engine, or whether special wagons were used. Nor do we know for certain how quickly they could be set up or disassembled; the chroniclers imply that the emperors' armies almost instantaneously set up the engines when a city rejected an imperial order to surrender. However, we can tell how they were guarded. They were at the center of the army, surrounded by all of the emperor's soldiers. This made them very difficult to attack or disrupt, and only in special situations, such as the debacle of Myriokephalon, when the imperial right flank division was completely shattered, would the enemy have been able to penetrate the Byzantine formation and attack the baggage train. In an analogous situation, when Alexios' army retreated from its 1116/17 incursion into Turkish territory, the troops formed a square, with heavy armed infantry marching shields outward, and therefore prevented the Turks from penetrating the Byzantine formation and attacking the baggage train, which in this instance also contained Greek-speaking refugees who were being transported from Turkish to Byzantine territory. In this case, discipline was maintained and the Turks were unable to attack the baggage. At Myriokephalon, discipline broke down with the inevitable result that the baggage was lost and the army dispersed.

Infantry and Siege Actions

What proportion of an army was used to protect siege engines? When Manuel was surprised at Myriokephalon, each division of his army contained cavalry, infantry, and archers. But did these divisions comprise the entire army, and what was the usual role of infantry? At Myriokephalon, it appears that the baggage train was virtually undefended; all of the army's soldiers were in the van, the rear guard, Baldwin's division, the left flank division, or among the emperor's soldiers. When these divisions were scattered, or prevented from safeguarding the baggage, it was left vulnerable to attack and seizure. Alexios' army similarly employed infantry to protect the baggage, and John II had a considerable force of infantry at the siege of Gangra. These men were undoubtedly there to support the siege

action; cavalry, except for the mounted archers that could be used against archers within target cities, were useless in sieges. Although references to infantry are rare in the Komnenian historians' accounts of battles, we should remember that if a campaign ended in a siege, infantry was present, and they were probably at least as numerous as the cavalry who protected the army on its way to its target. At Kinte John II used infantry standards to make the enemy think he had more cavalry squadrons than he actually possessed; this can only mean a considerable force of infantry was present. The only instances in which we cannot suppose this are when the cavalry was engaged in raiding, or when it was pursuing an enemy, or had ridden hard to meet an enemy. On these occasions, the infantry would not have been able to keep up with the cavalry. In some instances (for example Alexios' battles at Great Preslav, and Dyrrachion, or Manuel's fight against Conrad outside of the walls of Constantinople), infantry is specifically mentioned. They generally remain a mute group because their actions did not interest the courtier-historians who instead have chosen to present us with the actions of an elite. Circumstantial evidence, however, as well as their mention at sieges and in several battles, indicates that infantry were constantly present in Komnenian armies.

Psychological Effects of Siege Operations

Siegecraft was not merely a measure of the comparative value of offensive engines against passive defenses. Medieval cities and fortresses were constructed with active defense in mind. They contained postern gates for sorties to disrupt an assault or to attack the besieging engines, towers projected from walls so that converging fields of fire might be directed against attackers, and the defenders positioned their own engines around the walls, for use both against attacking infantry, and against the attackers' machines of war. Just as siegecraft was a science practiced both by attackers and defenders, it also had psychological elements. On the simplest level, we are occasionally treated to the spectacle of defenders who bare their genitals, or who make up scurrilous poems about the Byzantine emperor's wife and daughter. Bravado never hurt the morale of those cooped up inside the walls, and doing and saying things that infuriated the foe

undoubtedly had the added benefit of ensuring the defenders fought hard to avoid the wrath of those they so taunted.

Nevertheless, there were also examples of military terror practiced by besieging armies, of military action deliberately directed at civilians in an attempt to break their willpower and cause them to submit. At Gangra John II, unable to penetrate the walls with his engines, directed their fire against the houses within the city. As Choniates notes, "[L]ight stones which seemed to be flying rather than being shot from engines of war, shattered the houses; the inhabitants within fell to their knees and were killed by the caving-in of the roofs. As a result it was no longer safe to walk the streets nor to remain indoors."⁴¹ The city soon capitulated. Other examples can be found in the orations of Nikephoros Basilakes. When commenting on the siege of Tarsus, he says, "Indeed, you bring up the helepoleis, the devices, and the defenders are shaken in their souls,"⁴² and he describes stones falling on the city in an "artificial hailstorm," (a metaphor echoed by Theodore Prodromos), noting that they induced a helpless fear among the inhabitants.⁴³ One might well imagine the fear inspired by stones exceeding four hundred pounds falling suddenly and randomly upon houses, killing civilian inhabitants; attackers might also hurl sacks of inflammable material, or super-heated pellets that could cause fires at any hour of day or night.⁴⁴ With but a few casts of an engine each evening the attackers could make sure that the defenders got no rest. It was also a way of highlighting the impotence of the city's military defenders. While the enemy soldiers could counter mines and assaults by imperial soldiers with scaling ladders, they could do very little to visibly defend against an attacking army that possessed dozens of trebuchets. The Byzantines were always aware of the difference between the defending garrison and the city's civilian population, and military

⁴¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 20–21.

⁴² *Nicephori Basilacae Orationes et epistolae*, ed. A. Garzya (Leipzig, 1984), 58. The siege engines also cleared the forward towers of the enemy and demolished the outer wall (p. 57).

⁴³ *Nicephori Basilacae*, 59.

⁴⁴ George T. Dennis, 'Imperial Panegyric: Rhetoric and Reality', in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, 1997), 139. The counterweight trebuchet used by the Crusaders at Damietta cast stones of 409 pounds, while Arab sources speak of trebuchets casting stones of up to 571.

terror was usually directed at the civilians in an effort to divide them from the garrison, or to induce them to pressure the military authorities to surrender the city.

The trebuchet was not the only weapon of terror the Byzantine army had at its disposal. Sometimes the fear of a sack was a potent inducement to surrender. Usually, as at Gangra, the emperor or his envoys would offer the city the opportunity to capitulate and be spared the horrors of a sack. Nikephoros Ouranos, writing in the tenth century, counsels the emperor to announce to the defenders that if they surrender they will be allowed to leave with all their possessions. If this offer is refused, the inhabitants and all their property, including their houses, wives, and children will be the booty of the successful attacker.⁴⁵ At Zeugminon the victorious Byzantine army engaged in a frightful sack. When the Byzantine engines opened holes in the wall, the defenders surrendered or fled to save themselves, but this was too late. The imperial army entered the city and subjected it to a general slaughter and plunder. Choniates gives examples of rapine, and also of captives being slain for trifling reasons: a Byzantine soldier sees another Byzantine wearing a Hungarian hat; believing him to be a Hungarian captive, he cuts his head off with his sword. Such mentions of casual butchery are rare in our sources, and the stories from this particular action must have been violent indeed for Choniates to mention stories that reflected badly on the Byzantines.

Field battles were isolated incidents, and occurrences that usually did not involve the civilian population in significant hardships. Sometimes armies plundered the regions through which they passed, but the dangers of Turkish or Pecheneg raiding were a more common threat than a large army of ten to thirty thousand men passing through ones' home region. On the other hand, the essence of siege warfare was that the civilian population was affected. Every siege involved civilian hardship; even in a siege of short duration, civilians might be killed at any moment by a hail of large stones, or their houses burned. It was almost always in the civilians' best interests to see the city surrendered early. If the siege were lengthy, all

⁴⁵ McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 159. The text also states, "These are the things you will proclaim first to those within the fortress, for it causes disagreement and dissension among them, some favoring this, others that, which is of great benefit to us."

of the horrors of starvation, combined with the above terrors, were the lot of the civilian population, which was seldom as well provisioned as the garrison. Even when the imperial army entered the city, if the garrison retreated to the citadel or the acropolis then the city itself would become the armed camp of the attackers, and a battleground from which assaults would be launched, and upon which the garrison would pour arrows, stones, and whatever other measures remained to them. Siegecraft therefore frequently contained an element of psychological warfare: the emperors sought to terrorize the civilian population in order to induce them to force the city's surrender. Historians (Choniates and Kinnamos) and rhetoricians (Prodromos and Basilakes) equally understood this as a deliberate policy, and one of great value to the imperial army. The longer the imperial forces were in the field, the greater their deprivation, and the greater the difficulty of obtaining supplies. In the worst circumstances, as at Kinte under John II, the besieging army could find itself with horses dying, and supplies so short that the onset of bad weather could threaten the ability of the army to even successfully retreat to imperial territory. So, while these acts of terror were certainly not humane with respect to the civilian populations against whom they were practiced, they were a deliberate military device used to shorten sieges and enable the imperial armies to remain in fighting condition.

Conclusion

Sieges were more frequent than field battles; the people of Cilicia, Paphlagonia, the Dalmatian coast, and the other Byzantine and Turkish frontiers would have been more familiar with the stratagems and horrors of siege warfare than with field battles, even if the field battle remained the chroniclers' centerpiece, a *topos* of heroic military virtue that occupies more pages in our historians' accounts than their infrequency and lack of strategic importance warrants. Interestingly, the orations of Prodromos and Basilakes frequently mention sieges and extend the military-heroic *topos* to these imperial activities. The more conventional prose renderings of these events, as represented by John Kinnamos, Niketas Choniates, and particularly Anna Komnene regard the personal involvement of emperors in these activities as exceptional, and less worthy of note than battles involving opposing armies.

Why was Komnenian siegecraft so successful, and why was it so central an element of policy under the Komnenian emperors? The Macedonian emperors maintained a sophisticated program of frontier defense. The line of the Taurus Mountains in eastern Asia Minor provided a natural frontier, augmented by fortifications. Within this frontier were fortified army centers such as Dorylaion, Amorion, and the supply centers (*aplekta*) of Dorylaion, Koioncia, Kaisareia, Dazimon, Malagina, and Kaborkin. The army consisted of the *thematic* soldiers, provincial troops who could quickly respond to developing threats or minor raids, and the *tagmata*, a core of professional soldiers maintained in the capital. This system worked admirably when there was a frontier to defend. But after Manzikert (1071) there was no longer an effective frontier. Even had the *themata* of northern and western Asia Minor been able to withstand the Turkish invasions of the late eleventh century, it is doubtful that the frontier could have been permanently maintained by the Macedonian system, which relied upon a defense in depth that no longer existed. This system allowed an attacker to penetrate the frontier. He was ambushed on his return journey, but this meant that the imperial frontier was always porous. When Byzantine territory in Asia Minor was diminished to a strip of land along the northern coast and the river valleys of the western quarter of the peninsula, this system could not work. An invader could raid and be home again before any force, local or imperial, would be able to intervene. The Komnenian emperors developed a system of defense that was better suited than the Macedonian system to their tenuous hold on all but the coastlands—certain regions were carefully organized and provided troops (Neokastrea and Nicomedia). Other regions were secured by advance fortifications (Dorylaion and Soublaion), and were subject to nearly constant cross-border raiding. Many changed hands several times under the Komnenoi (Gangra and Neokastrea). Still others, particularly in the European half of the empire, were part of a defensive frontier that the emperors maintained at great cost (Zeugminon, Kerkyra, Dyrrachion).

What stands out about Komnenian siege warfare is the regular use of heavy siege engines (trebuchets). The Komnenian emperors used tortoises, mines, and soldiers equipped with scaling ladders, but the universal and decisive element of Byzantine siege warfare from the middle of the eleventh century to the end of the Komnenian dynasty was the presence of large trebuchets. And, because of the

preponderance of sieges (as opposed to field battles) in Komnenian warfare, it could be said that trebuchets were the most characteristic element of Byzantine offensive warfare of this period.⁴⁶ Indeed, when we examine how the Turks, for example, attacked Byzantine cities, it is apparent that they did not possess the same preponderance of siege engines that John II employed. At Gangra, for example, they were reduced to starving the Byzantine garrison of two thousand soldiers into submission; it is apparent that they did not have the ability to smash the walls with engines and storm the place.⁴⁷ Not only were the Byzantine armies under the Komnenian emperors capable of surrounding cities with engines, concentrating the fire of these engines through the accurate fire of professional, "illustrious" artillerymen, but they appear unique among their foes in their ability to do so.

⁴⁶ Choniates, *Historia*, 18 (for scaling ladders at Kastamon), p. 20 (missiles fired at the interior of the city, rather than the walls); Kinnamos, p. 244 (Byzantines undermine the walls of Zeugminon while attacking the walls with engines).

⁴⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 21.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE KOMNENIAN ARMY IN BATTLE

Weapons, Wounding and Phases of Battle

Wounding and death intrigued Byzantine chroniclers. This Byzantine fascination is particularly appropriate to the context of the eleventh and twelfth century Byzantine army. During this period, a wound became a mark of heroism. It could lead to high imperial favor, sometimes without much bravery or ability shown by the injured individual. For example, a nephew of the emperor Manuel had an eye put out by a lance during a joust. He was elevated to the ranks of the *protosebastoi*.¹ Perceptions of the noble and heroic were also changing, and warfare was becoming a quick route to the emperor's side. Furthermore, the plethora of well-chronicled military events between 1081 and 1180 lends itself to an examination of injury incurred from weapons.

First, we will examine the kinds of wounds mentioned by Byzantine Chroniclers. This will include how they were inflicted and which wounds were considered serious. This last is not always evident to the modern reader, who, if seriously injured, expects to receive immediate treatment in a modern hospital by a trauma team following established medical procedures. It is easy to transpose these modern assumptions to our texts and therefore fail to understand the importance of what medieval soldiers considered a "serious" wound. Second, we will examine Byzantine perceptions of these wounds. How did perceptions of injury coincide with the medical reality and limitations of twelfth century medicine? In other words, what killed Byzantine soldiers?

To attempt to answer this question, I have divided wounds into three functional categories:

- *mortal* wounds: those that were immediately fatal;

- *serious* wounds: those that removed a soldier from combat, but did not immediately kill him;
- *trivial* wounds: those that permitted a soldier to continue fighting.

These distinctions are important, because we gauge wounds differently today. Of course, modern survivability is still largely determined by the type of injury, but it is also related to the level of medical treatment available. Modern soldiers can survive many dismembering and penetrating wounds, provided that medical care is immediately available. This paradigm does not apply to the medieval world. Medical care was a function of what the casualty's fellow-soldiers could do in a few moments of attention; the nature of the wound was *the* primary factor determining survival. In fact, there is a high level of consistency among Byzantine chroniclers about which wounds led to death and which were innocuous. Some of what the chroniclers say is intuitive; men who wore heavy armor were less frequently killed. Yet, men in heavy armor *were* killed. When this happened, the mechanism of wounding was frequently a sword blow that shattered the helmet, or some sudden chance like being hit by a catapult stone, or an unexpected arrow or javelin. Bardas Phokas, a rebellious general from an illustrious family, died fighting in the civil wars of the late eleventh century. He was struck by a missile weapon of unspecified type, which caused him to fall from his horse. As he lay senseless, he was hacked to pieces and beheaded.² Our sources indicate that this kind of death was infrequent among heavily armored men.

The most frequent type of serious wound was the strike to the head. This most usually occurred when Byzantines or western *kataphraktoi* faced lighter armed opponents such as Pechenegs, or the Seljuk Turks. In these battles, fatal head wounds and the loss of hands and arms are frequent among the less-well-armored soldiers. Western opponents were less frequently killed by strikes to the head. Swords are the mechanism for nearly twice as many mortal wounds as lances, against both heavily and lightly armed opponents. Lances are the second most frequent mechanism of mortal wounds. (The lance category includes the effects of being unhorsed by a well-placed lance-thrust). The lance was the most effective tool for disabling a *kataphraktos* in the first few moments of combat. Mortality incidence

¹ John Kinnamos, *Ioannis Cinnami, Epitomi*, ed. A. Meineke (Bonn, 1836), 126.

² Michel Psellos, *Chronographie*, ed. Émile Renauld, 2 vols. (Paris, 1926), I, 11.

in our sources indicates that the most dangerous phase of combat was moment of contact between two charging forces, when one fifth of total serious and mortal wounds were inflicted within a few seconds. This initial clash was performed by two forces of lance-armed cavalry charging each other at a gallop. Missile weapon wounds appear either before or after the clash of heavy cavalry, while other weapons are infrequently mentioned as sources of wounds.

As I indicated earlier, one of the problems with relying upon literary evidence rather than upon medical statistics is that literary sources prefer to describe unusual or dramatic wounds. The sources also compel us to examine wounds suffered by their own social class, the elite—the best-armored and -armed troops—and ignore wounds received by common soldiers. Therefore, the infantry, the military arm that was present in most medieval armies and that supported the cavalry, remains a mute group in any discussion of Byzantine injury in battle.

When and how were wounds delivered? Field battles were characterized by a clash of cavalry armed with lances, followed by a swirling melee. Niketas Choniates describes the battle of Semlin, fought between Byzantine and Hungarian heavy cavalry in 1167.

When the Romans (Byzantines) met <the> attack, both sides fought for a while with lances, jostling one another; once the lances were shattered, . . . they unsheathed their long swords and fell upon one another, flailing away. When their blades were blunted by the troops' armor, . . . the Romans, taking hold of their iron maces . . . , smote the Hungarians, and the blow against head and face was fatal . . . many fell off their saddles; others bled to death from the wounds.³

For purposes of our analysis, a medieval battle has two segments. The first phase consisted of skirmishing. Arrows, javelins, and stones from slings caused some wounds during this phase. Next came the main clash of cavalry. Heavy cavalry, whether western European or Byzantine, was armed with lances or heavy spears. The first few moments of the clash, lances pierced armor and threw combatants off their horses. The Seljuk Turks were *usually* lighter armored, while the Pechenegs were *always* lighter armored than the Byzantines. When the Byzantines forced these less-well-equipped cavalry armies to fight

³ Niketas Choniates, *Niketai Choniatai Historia*, ed. J. Van Dieten, CFHB (Berlin, 1975), 156–57.

hand-to-hand, lances and swords inflicted the most wounds.

Lance wounds, made with all the momentum of a charging horse, proved fatal in just under one fifth of casualties. (The actual data from which these details are derived are discussed below in the Statistics section). First, a clean strike could penetrate shield and chain mail or breastplate, and kill instantaneously. Anna Komnene provides a good example of this. At the battle of Glabinitza, a Byzantine soldier was struck by a lance, torn from his saddle, and thrown to the ground. He died instantly.⁴ The lance is also the wounding mechanism in one fifth of the examples provided by our sources.

A second natural source of injury for troops fighting on horseback was falling from one's mount. Riding a horse was an inherently dangerous activity. Injury could result from a fall, from the clash of lances, from trampling, or from the horse falling on its rider. The four sources that we are relying upon for casualty data all realized that horses were dangerous, and all mention incidents where horses caused injuries. This sometimes happened outside of combat. Anna Komnene mentions several instances, while John Kinnamos remarks that emperor Manuel I suffered memory losses after his horse fell upon him during a polo game.⁵ Alexios also fell from his horse during a game of polo; he never fully recovered.⁶ The strangest case of fatal injury in these sources is described by Anna Komnene. The Grand Domestic Pakourianos died after crashing into an oak tree during a battle with the Pechenegs.⁷ Lance thrusts and sword slashes together account for about half of mortal wounds, but horses contributed to the danger of combat, as we will see below in the Statistics section.

Following the clash of lances came the combat of swords. The Byzantine blade was either a straight one, or the *paramerion*, which was curved like a nineteenth century cavalry saber. After the initial shock of the charge, the most dangerous attack was a direct, overhead blow to his head. If a cavalryman's helmet withstood such a blow, a strike to the head might not result in death. Alexios I

⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiade*, ed. Bernard Leib, 3 vols. (Paris, 1937–76), III, 105 (XIII, 5).

⁵ Kinnamos, 264.

⁶ *Alexiade*, III, 159–60 (XIV, 4).

⁷ *Alexiade*, II, 83 (VI, 14).

narrowly avoided serious injury when a Norman sword stroke to his face was deflected by the rim of his helmet.⁸ Nevertheless, the results of head strikes could be fearsome. Alexios' Armenian vassal Oshin struck a Norman soldier on the head, splitting the helmet apart and likewise splitting the head beneath it.⁹ Lightly armored soldiers frequently died from blows to the head. Descriptions of battles with Turks, who were invariably lighter armored than their Byzantine or western European opponents, are filled with descriptions of lopped off hands, limbs, and heads.

The strike to the head was not the only threat from an overhand sword blow. An attack that missed the helmet frequently caused other damage. In 1081, at Dyrrachion, Alexios I smashed a man's collarbone and arm with an overhand blow.¹⁰ The most common wound type from a sword slash that misses the head appears to be a blow that cuts off the hand or arm. By our functional definitions, these wounds were serious but not immediately fatal. Wounds that penetrated the viscera, on the other hand, were nearly always *ultimately* fatal. The most famous Byzantine example of this was the wound the emperor Staurakios received when his father's army was ambushed in the mountains by a host of Bulgarians. Staurakios received a stomach wound that became infected, and he lingered several months, suffering horribly.¹¹

Unfortunately, it is often difficult to differentiate penetrating lance wounds from those that occurred when an individual was thrown from his horse in the first moments of combat. Our chroniclers may only state that a soldier was thrown from his horse, without telling us whether this was from the shock of the charge, or from a successful lance attack. Hand and arm wounds are more carefully described by our sources. Emperors Manuel and Alexios each lopped off the hand of an enemy in battle, but in neither case did the victim die. Lost fingers must also have been a very common occurrence, particularly among troops without mailed gloves (such as bowmen and lighter armed cavalry), but there are few mentions of this in the texts. John Kantakouzenos, a Byzantine general, lost two fingers in battle against the Serbians on the Tara River, but appar-

⁸ *Alexiade*, I, 162 (IV, 6).

⁹ *Alexiade*, III, 59 (XII, 2).

¹⁰ *Alexiade*, I, 162 (IV, 6).

¹¹ For a description of this campaign and its aftermath, see: Treadgold, Warren, *The Byzantine Revival: 780-842*. (Stanford, 1988), 174-177.

ently suffered no further ill effects from infection.¹² What we can conclude from our texts is that hand, arm, and wrist wounds, including the severing of hands from arms, did not necessarily result in the victim's death. Battlefield survival rates for lesser wounds to the limbs were high. Unfortunately, we have no direct way of knowing whether these injured soldiers survived their wounds, or whether they later died from infection and gangrene. We also have no evidence whether the medical attention they received had any effect upon their recovery.

Medical Treatment

How did Byzantines treat wounds? They were unaware of the cause of infection, or of fulminating sepsis as a cause of death, and lancing was called "surgery."¹³ How did their treatment methods indicate their perception of what was dangerous and unusual? The best description of death from a wound (although not one sustained in battle) appears in Choniates, who describes the death of emperor John II Komnenos.¹⁴ John cut himself with a poisoned arrow while hunting wild boar. When the emperor thrust his spear into the boar, the animal lunged at him, driving John's spear-arm backward into a quiver of arrows. He nicked himself between his fourth and fifth fingers on a poison smeared arrow. The emperor's response was to apply an *ekdora* (a skin) to the wound.¹⁵ The *ekdora* was a piece of leather from a sandal, or a piece of flesh from a dead animal, which was tied over the wound. This procedure appears several times in our sources. John did not mention his scratch to the *iatroi* (doctors), who accompanied the imperial camp, and his arm swelled. The physicians—*iatroi* and *asklepiadai*—rushed to the emperor when they discovered he had been wounded. They wisely removed the *ekdora* from John's suppurating finger, and applied medications to the wound, but these drugs had no effect. Finally, the doctors decided to lance the arm, but the lancing only increased the swelling. John's arm grew to the size of a man's thigh. The emperor died painfully, after refusing the further ministrations of his unfortunate *iatroi*. (In terms

¹² Kinnamos, 112.

¹³ Choniates, *Historia*, 40-41.

¹⁴ Choniates, *Historia*, 40-47.

¹⁵ Choniates, *Historia*, 40.

of modern medicine, his death is much more consistent with infection than poisoning. His death after a weeklong illness must have been from wound sepsis.)

The *ekdora* requires explanation. Niketas Choniates calls it a piece of leather from John's shoe. (In another context, Choniates mentions a soldier who offered to slice off a piece of his own flesh to make an *ekdora* for Emperor Manuel.¹⁶ Manuel graciously refused, and instead used flesh from a dead horse). In the case of John's injury, the doctors considered the *ekdora* an aberration. They removed it, but had little better to offer. This does not give us confidence in their ability to handle problems such as gangrene and infection in poorly-cared for wounds. If the *ekdora*, the unsanitary 'band-aid' of the Byzantine soldier, was as common as our sources make it appear, it must have accounted for a considerable number of deaths from infections.

Initially, John's wound was little more than a scratch. No one considered it serious even though the arrow that caused it was poisoned. John did what he would have done with any wound: he applied a 'skin' to it. First, this demonstrates an ignorance of the effects of poisons and infection. Second, it is important to note that in the failure of the *iatroi*, and in John's attitude towards medicine, we encounter a problem peculiar to the Byzantine mentality. Michael Psellos, perhaps the best-educated Byzantine of the late eleventh century, considered himself a medical expert. He was comfortable diagnosing the emperor Isaac Komnenos' fever because he had read on the subject.¹⁷ Psellos also considered himself a military expert because he had read about that subject. Anna Komnene relates that during her father's final illness, she was consulted about his treatment because she had wide knowledge of medical texts. The Byzantines revered the polymath. Education, rather than practical training, was the hallmark of a man of affairs. We must consider the peculiar position of the Byzantine *iatros* in light of this intellectual attitude. Doctors were educated, an elite, but their education and reading—which Byzantines equated with training—were sometimes less than that of the people they served. In a world where anyone who had read Galen could claim medical knowledge, and in which most educated people had read Galen, the physician's authority was precarious. This casual attitude toward formal medical care resulted in John II's death

¹⁶ Kinnamos, 62–63.

¹⁷ Psellos, II, 129–30.

and a crisis of succession. Epistolographic research by Alexander Kazhdan has demonstrated that Byzantine attitudes changed between the eighth and twelfth centuries, and the educated person's disdain for doctors was replaced with a sarcastic acceptance.¹⁸ This may be true in the correspondences that have survived, but our literary sources indicate that even emperors did not consider *iatroi* the first recourse after injury.

Sources and Statistics

The nature of the Byzantine chronicle imposes restrictions on our interpretation of wounds, the mechanisms of wounding, and medical treatment. Anna Komnene, Niketas Choniates, John Kinnamos and Michael Psellos all express a bias toward presenting events that involved their class, the social and intellectual elite. They describe cavalry battles and almost completely ignore the infantry, yet oblique references to long siege trains and numerous banners indicate infantry were present in most armies. Yet, descriptions of Byzantine common soldiers rarely appear in our sources. The single exception is that wounds sustained by Turkish soldiers, the Byzantines' constant enemy, are described. Battles with them furnish numerous examples, representative of the wounding that would occur when a poorly armed soldier met a more heavily armed and armored opponent. For example, Choniates describes how a French army under Louis VII pinned a Turkish army against the Maiander River. The Turks had no way to escape, and were slaughtered where they stood, while inflicting few French casualties. The river-course became clogged with Turkish arms and body parts.¹⁹ It is also difficult to determine whether the sources are biased toward certain types of wounds. For example, there are few examples of death from archery fire. Does this mean that archery was largely ineffective against the defensive protection worn by the Byzantine cavalryman? Or, do our sources ignore these types of injuries and focus instead on hand-to-hand combat because it was more glorious and made for a better story?

¹⁸ Kazhdan A., 'The Image of the Medical Doctor in Byzantine Literature of the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries,' in: Scarborough J. ed. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers, Number Thirty-Eight, 1984: Symposium on Byzantine Medicine* (Washington, D.C.: 1985), 1–11.

¹⁹ Choniates, *Historia*, 71.

A short catalog of imperial contact with the enemy is in order, since these descriptions represent the epitome of what it meant to be a Byzantine military man in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Michael Psellos describes the injury and capture of Romanos IV at the battle of Manzikert (1071), where the Byzantine army was destroyed and dispersed. The emperor was wounded, fell off his horse, but survived and was captured.²⁰ Such descriptions are rare in Psellos, who was more interested in the ruler's personality than in the military details of the reign. In contrast, the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene abounds with wound descriptions. According to Anna's account, Alexios I was wounded six times in battle, and inflicted six wounds over the course of his career. The brief accounts of John II's reign given by Kinnamos and Choniates include one instance of imperial injury in battle; a Pecheneg arrow struck the emperor in his leg.²¹ Manuel Komnenos received three wounds, according to Choniates, and he inflicted two wounds, both of which killed the recipient. Kinnamos mentions no less than seven occasions when Manuel received wounds. Emperors, who had access to the best armor and weapons, and who were surrounded by the best guards, nevertheless regularly engaged in hand-to-hand combat, and were often injured. We should remember these examples when we turn to wound statistics in the next section. Most of the wounds mentioned there are single occurrences. One wound was inflicted upon one man, who seldom again appears as a casualty in the narrative. In fact, most soldiers, particularly the shock cavalry, were not as well protected as emperors but would have received least as many wounds.

Before examining numbers, we need to explore what our texts, as sources of statistics, demonstrate. Military heroism is a topos, a rhetorical stock theme, of Komnenian literature. That wounding and receiving wounds was a mark of distinction and heroism in Byzantium may appear self-evident to us, but the pre-Komnenian period possessed a different military ethos. Only from the late eleventh century onward did military prowess become the dominant path of advancement. For example, when Manuel saw his nephew John injured in a jousting contest, he awarded John the high title of *protosebastos*.²² Moreover, when Manuel chose to impress foreign knights

²⁰ Psellos, II, 162.

²¹ Kinnamos, 8.

²² Kinnamos, 126.

he did not show them his fleet, or his treasury. This is what Alexios had done with the leaders of the First Crusade nearly a hundred years before. Instead, Manuel showed western knights his lance, demonstrating how exceptionally long and heavy it was.²³ Manuel's lance was a far more effective symbol of imperial potency than were demonstrations of wealth. It was also a more personal demonstration of the nature of Komnenian power, and a more personal threat. A lance brandished by someone who had never known combat would not have been an effective political tool. But Manuel had suffered injury. He was a veteran of many hand-to-hand struggles. Because he had personally thrown down many foes, because he had killed men in battle, his gesture had meaning. Injury, then, except for the universally abhorred infection, became a Komnenian topos, part of a rhetorical canon among chroniclers, and a method of advancement and recognition among the practical folk who fought for the emperor.

The Nature of Battle

The nature of protective armor and weapons did not substantially change between the sixth and the thirteenth centuries. Mounted heavy cavalry wore chain or scale-mail and helmets, and carried large shields. These were round and wide at the top, and tapered to a point. This teardrop, or kite, shape protected the upper body and the as much of the left side of a warrior as possible. Light-armed cavalry wore padded silk or leather garments. Byzantine chroniclers only presented the exploits of the elite, so this forces us to focus upon the heavily armored cavalymen and the kinds of wounds that occurred when their superior armor was penetrated.

The physical procedure by which cavalry combat occurred also determined the types of wounds a soldier received. Battles were usually between large forces of cavalry and infantry, which lined up across from each other on fields chosen because they had few physical impediments. After some skirmishing by light-armed cavalry and infantry, the real combat began with the charge both sides' heavy cavalry. The force generated by horses packed shoulder to shoulder

²³ Kinnamos, 125.

and crashing into each other, the riders armed with heavy spears or lances, was considerable and resulted in many early casualties. This shock combat, and the injuries it caused, had a disproportionate effect on the combat effectiveness and cohesion of the army with the less successful charge. This is demonstrated by the effect of the superior Norman charge against a Byzantine army at Dyrrachion in 1081. The Norman charge so disrupted the Byzantine heavy cavalry that the Byzantine force immediately fled the field. Battles could also last up to several hours, such as the fight between the Byzantines and a Hungarian cavalry force at Semlin, in 1167. In these cases, relays of noncombatants supplied water to the frontline fighters. Sword and mace wounds were delivered during this lengthier phase of battle.

One substantial difference between the medieval battle and modern combat is the absence of friendly fire casualties. Missile fire usually ended once the hand-to-hand combat began; when the main lines drew near, the lightly armored missile troops (the *pellasts* and *psiloi*) withdrew to the flanks or the rear to avoid the impending charge of heavily armored cavalry (the *kataphraktoi*). Once the heavy cavalry charged, the only activity that could cause friendly casualties was the charge of the second line or reserve. Packed shoulder to shoulder, the second line had little ability to avoid trampling the wounded of either side. One of the primary duties of Byzantine medical corpsmen, (*deputatoi*) according to the military manuals, was to remove wounded soldiers from the path of charge of the second line.²⁴

Burn injuries were virtually nonexistent in medieval battles. The only exception to this was in naval warfare, which is outside the scope of this study, and in siege warfare. The Byzantine navy frequently used Greek fire against their opponents. This substance, and the way it was delivered to enemy ships, has never been precisely determined. Indeed, the composition and delivery system were Byzantine state secrets. (Some modern authors, however, suggest that the ingredients were possibly a powdered mixture of sulfur, naphtha, and quicklime).²⁵ Whatever the exact composition of this early chemical

²⁴ Dennis, G.T., *Das Strategikon Des Maurikios*. Vienna; Verlag Der Österreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1981, 126-9.

²⁵ Kirchner, D.B., Gaydos, J.C., and Batigelli, M.C. 'Combustion products of propellants and ammunition.' In: Deeter, D.P., and Gaydos, J.C., eds., *Occupational*

weapon, most ships that were struck by Greek Fire burned, and the sailors, many of whom could not swim, also burned—whether they stayed aboard their ships or jumped into water covered with a burning slick of the oily substance. Greek Fire was not used in Komnenian land combat.

Other kinds of injuries were infrequent in Byzantine field battles. Caltraps, four pointed, fist-sized, spiked objects, which were designed so that one sharp spike always pointed straight up, were employed against cavalry attacks but with only mixed results. Traps and tricks, such as trenches or rolling heavy objects down a hill at an approaching enemy, also appear infrequently in our sources. Injuries from artillery—catapults or trebuchets—were likewise rare. These devices were used almost exclusively against stationary obstacles such as gates and walls, or in counter-battery fire against other such engines. Occasionally, catapults or trebuchets would hurl pitch-soaked projectiles, or hot pieces of lead into a besieged city. Such weapons could have considerable effect upon the morale of the defenders. The Byzantines and their enemies seldom used artillery in an antipersonnel role, except when attempting to destroy soldiers who were manning enemy artillery.

Our sources provide little information on multiple wounds to a single soldier. Modern casualty and mortality data²⁶ indicate that multiple wounds are common (e.g., American soldiers in the Vietnam War who died from bullet wounds had usually been hit by three or more bullets), but medieval sources do not mention comparable information. Choniates, for example, mentions warriors striking each other, and being struck, but this is part of the normal rhetoric of battle and should not be taken to indicate that multiple wounds were delivered. Most Byzantine wound descriptions are of a single injury. This is a function of source bias; chroniclers wanted to present only the most dramatic examples of injury, although the soldier in question would likely have possessed several other, less-lethal injuries than the one explicitly described.

Other modern paradigms that do not appear in Byzantine sources are (1) a way to evaluate the severity of casualties' wounds, and (2)

Health: The Soldier and the Industrial Base. In: Zajtcuk, R., and Bellamy, R.F., eds., *Textbook of Military Medicine* (Washington, 1993), 361.

²⁶ Bellamy, R.F., 'Combat Trauma Overview,' in: Zajtcuk, R., Grande, C.M., eds., *Anesthesia and Perioperative Care of the Combat Casualty*. *Textbook of Military Medicine*, Zajtcuk, R., Bellamy, R., eds. 10.

an 'echelon-based' system of evacuation and provision of medical care. Doubtless Byzantine soldiers either returned to duty or remained in camp after their injuries were treated, but we have no source evidence that indicates how or by whom this decision was made. In the absence of a centralized military medical institution, the most likely procedure was that the soldier's immediate supervising officer would determine his disposition, but there is no firm evidence for this. Anecdotal evidence from the chronicles—examples of soldiers treating each other—and evidence for medical corpsmen drawn from the military manuals indicate that the wounded were probably given treatment in a rudimentary manner by their fellow soldiers. However, unlike in modern armies, the casualties were then returned to duty, or sat in camp if seriously wounded, to live or die according to fate and their level of injury. Our sources indicate no provision for moving seriously wounded soldiers to a facility that provided a higher level of care, and there is no evidence that doctors treated the injuries of common soldiers in camp.

Doctors appeared when it was obvious that a wound might be fatal, but this treatment was probably limited to important people. Even John II received the same initial treatment that a common soldier might have received. An *ekdora* was placed upon a wound,²⁷ and the injured soldier was then carted away or carried back to the army camp on a spare horse. The sources describe no further treatment by military doctors or corpsmen. There is also no evidence that the system of Byzantine philanthropic hospitals made provision for the care and healing of discharged soldiers. Furthermore, these discharged soldiers do not appear in other places in the chronicles. The one case in which individuals frequently reappear after injury does not occur in a military context. This singular case was blinding, often used as a punishment for rebellion.

To recapitulate, the texts indicate that medical care was provided on the field of battle, and little further care was probably available for the common soldier. The emperor might, if his wound appeared serious, receive the attention of doctors, but in John's case, such help was called for too late. Doctors accompanied the army, and a group of them attended the emperor, but they were a last resort, utilized when folk medicine failed.

²⁷ Choniates, *Historia*, 40. Kinnamos, 62–63.

Data Sources

As mentioned earlier, modern readers need to keep in mind that the wounds described by Byzantine chroniclers reflected each author's interests. Anna Komnene, Niketas Choniates, John Kinnamos, and Michael Psellos were highly educated members of the Byzantine elite, but none (except, perhaps, Kinnamos) had seen military action. What impelled them to describe military events and the associated injuries that fill their chronicles? Anna Komnene wrote from reverence for her deceased father and because she hated her brother, who placed her in a monastery after he defeated two coups she sponsored. Choniates spent several decades working on his *Historia*. He is critical of the Komnenoi; he blames them for the empire's subsequent ills, during which he lost his high bureaucratic position and everything he owned. He was once *harmostes*, (military paymaster), in Thrace, and so had contact with soldiers through this activity. Kinnamos was Manuel's secretary, and Manuel's military activities provide about half of the military actions from which the information in this study is derived. It is probable that Kinnamos accompanied Manuel on his campaigns, and possible that he had once been a soldier. Finally, Psellos advised several emperors, and was in intimate contact with soldiers, even if he had no personal military experience.

Rhetoric also places limitations upon our use of quantitative wound information. The elite that ruled the Byzantine Empire, the Komnenoi, the Doukai, and the other great families, expected to find allusions to the Trojan War, or to other literature and events in the works they read. Anna Komnene obliges, picturing her father shattering regiments like any good Homeric hero. John Kinnamos echoes this in his description of Manuel I.²⁸ Luckily, it is easy to distinguish these types of actions from actual military description. First, they usually take place well before or after the main battle action. For example, after Alexios Komnenos was defeated at the Battle of Dyrrachion in 1081, Anna Komnene describes her father's miraculous escape, alone, from an apparent horde of pursuers. His horse leapt from rock to rock up a cliff, while his pursuers watched, bewildered.²⁹ Doubtless the reader was supposed to see in this description the hand

²⁸ Kinnamos, 192–93, 109–110. In this later passage, Kinnamos describes Manuel as, in body, like ancient heroes.

²⁹ *Alexiade*, I, 164. (IV, 7).

of God protecting the emperor for greater things, but what any reader of these chronicles should recognize is that the Byzantine audience who read such works immediately recognized the difference between such stylized descriptions of the emperor's escape and an actual description of combat. Byzantines read historical works, poetry, and even personal letters aloud to an audience of family and friends. The audience was supposed to recognize the author's erudition and his allusions to Homer, the Bible, and contemporary authors. Indeed, what separated the educated elite from their merely literate compatriots was this ability to detect and precisely comprehend erudite allusions and analogies. Therefore, while a certain poetic license is always present in Byzantine chronicles, we should recognize that the audience would usually be able to draw the distinction between rhetoric and actual combat description, all the more so since many of those in the audience would have been active or retired military officers.

Byzantine Wound Statistics

Now that we have made due allowance for the prejudices and proclivities of our chroniclers, and have examined the context in which wounds occurred (battle), we can turn to the information on wounds with which they provide us. My methodology has been to examine eleventh and twelfth century texts for examples of wounds sustained in battles between 1081 and 1180. To analyze wound descriptions we will explore (a) how wounds were received, (b) by what weapons, and (c) to what effect in terms of the soldiers' survival and ability to continue fighting. This analysis employs several conventions. Casualty data are organized according to soldiers' functional capabilities after wounding. Except for prominent individuals, we have few examples of whether an individual survived or died outside of the context of the initial injury. As mentioned earlier, for purposes of this study, the term *mortal* wound refers to those that resulted in immediate death on the field of battle. A *serious* wound refers to those that incapacitate a soldier and prevent him from continuing his combat functions. This includes the loss of hands, eyes, and other penetrating wounds that did not immediately kill the casualty. The high incidence of serious wounds is in part due to the sources' descriptive techniques. That is, wounds that might eventually have resulted in death are listed as serious in this study because a particular chron-

icler has not described the actual death, only the initial wound. For example, I have included unhorsing as a serious wound, since being unhorsed frequently caused injuries with long-term effects such as numbness of limbs and memory loss. *Trivial* wounds form the third category. These are wounds that did not result in immediate incapacitation; the soldier continued to fight. The often-vague language used by medieval chroniclers prevents definitions that are more specific.

I have also divided wounds by the type of weapon that delivered them (ie, the wounding mechanism). The weapons described below formed the standard armament of medieval cavalry. In addition, I have included categories for wounding by falling horses, and an "unknown" category for wounds whose severity is described, but whose wound mechanism is not mentioned. Our sources most often mention combat between two armies of heavily armed cavalrymen. In a few examples, the opponents are lighter-armed Turkish mounted archers and these account for most of the missile wound descriptions. We know the general nature of infantry weapons and armor from both earlier military manuals and from contemporaneous artistic sources, but because we have no specific source data on infantry who were wounded and killed in battle, this study cannot attempt to compare statistics of wounding and death for actions involving infantry versus cavalry.

Table 1. Wound level and mechanism

	Sword	Lance	Missile	Knife/ Mace	Artillery	Horse	Other	Total
Mortal	11	3	5	2	3	1	6	31
Serious	10	9	2	0	1	4	2	28
Trivial	10	2	2	1	0	0	0	15
Unspecified	2	1	0	1	0	0	10	14
Total	33	15	9	4	4	5	18	88

Table 1 table is a compilation of wound incidence data, described by weapon and severity.³⁰ Combat with lances lasted moments, yet they produced 18.8% of wound descriptions. These wounds were

³⁰ These data were derived from an examination of Anna Komnene, *The*

seldom trivial. Swords were used for the next several hours. Maces were the weapons of last resort, but, like knives, they appear infrequently in our sources. Note that swords produced a disproportionate percentage of mortal wounds (35.5%), far exceeding the incidence of mortal wounds produced by lances (9.7%). Swords also produced 35.7% of the serious wounds, and 58.8% of trivial wounds. Lances, on the other hand, produced 32.1% of serious wounds while they produced only 11.7% of trivial wounds.

These data should not be interpreted to mean that swords were far more effective weapons than lances. Remember that lance injuries occurred during the first few moments, or at best minutes, of combat, until the lances were shattered by the charge or rendered useless by the close press of friend or foe. Then medieval soldiers relied upon their swords, and used them until they were blunted. The mace, a virtually indestructible, blunt, crushing weapon, was the weapon of last resort. We would expect more descriptions of mace wounds, but battle was frequently decided before it became necessary to use them. During the period under discussion (1081-1180), the Byzantines regarded maces as less useful than sword or lance. Nevertheless, maces had been a part of the Byzantine soldier's arsenal since the ninth century, and remained a standard piece of military equipment.

Our picture of how wounds were delivered becomes more distinct when we look at whether wounds were trivial (allowed the soldier to remain in combat) or serious or mortal (removed the soldier from combat), and when they occurred during a battle. Lances caused 20.3% of all injuries that removed soldiers from battle (as reported by our sources). This means that one fifth of those who fell in battle fell in battle during the first charge. This is significant because many armies, the Byzantine included, placed their best soldiers in the front ranks, and the loss of these would have had a disproportionate effect upon the combat worthiness of the rest of the army. On the other hand, wounding with swords (37.3% of wounds that removed soldiers from combat) occurred over several hours.

Archery and occasionally javelins (missile fire) both preceded the clash of lances and occurred after the battle, when one side was

Alexiad, Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, the *Historia* of Niketas Choniates, and the history of John Kinnamos.

routed and was being pursued. Missile injuries accounted for 11.3% of total wounds described by our sources, and 11.9% of wounds that removed an individual from combat. We should remember that these casualties were from the best-armed and -armored elements of an army, and that missile fire would have had a correspondingly greater effect upon "lighter" troops, which had less armor and less-well-protected horses, especially among infantry skirmishers.

Because our source descriptions are often nonspecific, we cannot either determine the wound location or the weapon that caused it in 12.25% of total wounds and 19.4% of the mortal wounds. Nevertheless, according to the descriptions provided by our sources, lances produced one fifth of the wounds that removed a cavalrymen from combat (and probably these wounds were heavily concentrated among the front-line, elite men). Pre- and post-battle archery accounted for nearly one eighth of wounds that removed a soldier from combat. This degree of losses is yet another reason we should not be surprised when our sources place great emphasis upon the initial stages of battle, and on the first charge: defeating an enemy before the hours-long melee, in which swords inflicted over a third of the serious injuries, was an important component in keeping an army fresh, combat worthy, and able to continue a campaign.

Table 2. Wounds by Seriousness and Body Region

	Head	Torso	Arms	Legs	Unspecified	Total Unspecified
Mortal	10	11	2	2	11	35
Serious	2	11	7	0	7	27
Trivial	9	3	0	2	5	19
Total Wounds	21	25	9	2	23	80

Table 2 further breaks down the wound data from Table 1 by seriousness and body region. Most (88%) mortal and serious wounds were delivered to the torso, the largest but the best-protected target, with the head a close second (57.1%). The cavalryman's body was protected by his long kite-shield, then by a coat of chain mail, and finally by a heavy quilted *gambeson*, a garment of cotton and linen

that absorbed the shock of any blow. Sometimes wealthy riders wore a corselet of metal scales over all of this to offer additional protection to the torso. Despite creating a virtual sweat suit for anyone so armored, this arrangement offered excellent protection from sword strikes.

Note the disparity in Table 2 between mortal and serious wounds to the head. It appears that a strike to the head, most often delivered by a sword, either killed the casualty outright or did little damage, with only a few incidences causing serious trauma. Strikes to the torso are more evenly divided between mortal and serious wounds. Arms, including hands, however, were perhaps the least protected part of a medieval cavalryman's body, and a large percentage (78%) of arm wounds were serious. Finally, note the small number of total wounds to the cavalryman's legs. Protected by mail, padding, and a kite shield, they were well defended, and also difficult to hit by a cavalryman raised up in his stirrups to deliver a forceful blow to his opponent's upper body or head.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to correlate the type and location of a wound with specific medical treatments to see if treatment resulted in better recovery. Furthermore, archaeological evidence provides us with plenty of information about surgical instruments, but no information about recovery rates, or even likely causes of death. Few Byzantine battle sites have been excavated.

Table 3. Wounds by mechanism, location, and severity

Serious/ Trivial Wounds >	Head		Torso		Arms		Legs		Ser	Triv
	Ser	Triv	Ser	Triv	Ser	Triv	Ser	Triv		
Sword	8	8	3	1	6	0	1	0	2	1
Lance	1	0	11	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Missile	2	1	4	0	1	0	—	—	0	1
Knife/Mace	—	—	2	0	—	—	—	—	—	1
Artillery	—	—	2	0	—	—	—	—	2	0
Horses	1	0	—	—	—	—	1	0	3	0
Other	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	2

Table 3 compares the body region wounded with wounds' degree of seriousness, and also categorizes the data by weapon. The head and torso each received about a third of serious (in this table either *serious* or *mortal*, by our classification; in other words, those wounds that removed an individual from combat,) wounds, while the final third results from injuries whose location is not specified. The torso is the location of the largest number of serious wounds. The largest single cause of serious wounds to the torso is the lance. After this, wounds to arms are most numerous, and all but one were delivered by the sword. Almost as many trivial wounds were delivered to the head as mortal, suggesting that medieval head protection was at least somewhat effective. Our sources occasionally mention wounds in conjunction with the protective function of a helmet or visor. In the two cases where this protection proved inadequate, one wound was caused by an arrow that struck a soldier in the temple, and the other injury came from a lance wound to an eye. We should note that helmets usually did not have metal visors that fully covered the face, at least among Byzantine troops, and that the eyes were left unprotected by metal plates or chain. Mail was often suspended from the front of open helmets, but the eye areas were left open to permit visibility and ventilation.

Table 4 demonstrates the relative chance of being removed from combat by an injury inflicted by a particular mechanism. (Keep in mind that the actual number of injuries inflicted by artillery or horses was very small). For example, if a soldier received an injury delivered by a sword, there was a 60% chance that he would have been removed from combat. Table 5, in contrast, shows that he stood about a one-in-three chance of being killed. As stated earlier, swords accounted for the vast majority of battlefield injuries. However, every example that our source documents give of artillery striking an individual results in death; 100% of those struck by artillery died. We should not confuse the statistics in Table 4 and Table 5 with wound incidence; rather, they demonstrate the chances of being removed from the battle, and the chances of receiving a mortal wound, both by the mechanism of injury.

Table 4. Injury Mechanism Causing Combatant Removal From Battle

Mechanism of Injury	Chance of Removal
Artillery	100%
Horses	100%
Lances	85.7%
Weapon Unspecified	80%
Missile weapons	77%
Swords	66%

Table 4. Mortal Wounding, By Mechanism of Injury

Mechanism of Injury	Chance of Mortality
Artillery	75%
Weapon Unspecified	60%
Missile weapons	55.5%
Swords	36.6%
Lances	28.6%
Horses	20%

To recapitulate our interpretations of Byzantine wound data, (of the wounds we can identify), 26.3% were delivered to the head, 31.3% to the torso, and 16.3% to the limbs. Of mortal wounds, 28.6% were to the head, 31.4% were to the torso, and only 11.4% were delivered to the extremities. 7.4% of serious wounds were delivered to the head, 40.7% were delivered to the torso, and 25.9% to the extremities. Keeping in mind our sources' biases, these comparisons enable us to make several conclusions regarding Byzantine warfare.

- The lance, while inflicting fewer than one fifth of wounds (see Table 1), was very effective at removing critical individuals (front-line cavalry soldiers) from combat (86%, see Table 4).
- In Byzantine battle lines, the file-leaders, the first man in line, was usually the equivalent of a modern noncommissioned officer and was responsible for the seven men lined up behind him. Losing him in the first critical moments of combat frequently disrupted the side that lost the most file leaders.

- It is a misconception to assume that all armies' mounted heavy cavalry was armed and armored alike.
- Those killed early on often were the pick of the army in both equipment and training. However, armies in the Komnenian period were occasionally organized by separating the best troops from the others into special units; therefore, our comments about losses to the best cavalry can only be accepted when the sources specify whether such troops were organized separately or integrated into all units.

Medieval chroniclers tend towards dramatic exaggeration, but they are ostensibly interested in presenting history of contemporary events. This is not the place to begin a discussion of Byzantine or Homeric *topoi*, or of the political motives of Byzantine chroniclers. The genesis and development of events can be debated, but the types of injuries produced by particular weapons is directly known. An audience listening to an historical chronicle would have followed the story, and would have been unconcerned with the statistical accuracy of specific wound descriptions compared with the general wound population. Choniates, for example, wrote politically motivated history. He describes combat as it occurs naturally in his chronological narrative, with due allowance for the exaggeration expected of a Byzantine raconteur.

Summary

For historians, examining texts for information on Byzantine warfare and wounding is an interesting way of obtaining information about the Byzantine zeitgeist of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. How did the Byzantines, at their lowest political ebb in 1081, respond to involuntary interactions with Turks, Hungarians, Normans, and the hordes of western Christians who participated in the Crusades, and most of whom passed through Byzantine territory? One effect of this was a militarization of society. In the fifty years preceding the Komnenian dynasty, only one emperor, Isaac Komnenos, was from the military "party." The Komnenian emperors, all soldiers, instituted one hundred years of military activity. This militarization was reflected in the rhetoric of court poets and in the preference of chroniclers for heroic and military themes. Less time was spent

describing cultural accomplishments and religious decisions and acts of these emperors. The Komnenian emperors were less comfortable in the palace and instead governed from the armed camps that were their usual home.

Byzantine sources provide historians with a wealth of military data. However, Byzantine chroniclers wrote not only for the edification of their peers, the educated elite, but also for personal motives. How can these sources be mined for information on wounds and wounding, particularly since the Komnenian period does not possess a *taktika* (military manual)? The answer is: carefully. The statistics on wounds used here were derived from a careful reading of textual accounts, and a certain amount of subjectivity enters such work. Is a soldier who has been thrown from his horse by a lance-blow removed from combat? Is his injury serious? For purposes of this discussion, the answer is *yes*, because the text leaves him lying unconscious on the ground. What we can never know is what percentage of these men were able to stand up, find another horse, and continue fighting. Other source biases limit the kinds of information the historian can glean from the texts. Infantry, who appear in equal numbers to the cavalry in our tenth century military manuals, are a mute group in eleventh through twelfth century chronicles, despite the role they must have played in sieges. The chroniclers wrote for an audience who heard their writings in a social forum where such works were read publicly. They wrote for a socially and politically elite audience, one that included cavalymen (*kataphraktoi*), but not infantry (the common soldiers). We have almost no examples in our sources of injury to infantry and only a few examples describe infantry in combat. Therefore, this chapter is an examination of elite wounding and elite injury. Whatever statistics we have examined, we can be sure that the less well-protected infantry and lighter-armored cavalry suffered worse, and probably received poorer medical treatment in addition.

These statistics demonstrate several interesting paradigms of Byzantine medicine and warfare. First, lance-combat was performed in the first few moments of battle, while many battles lasted hours. Yet, lances accounted for about 20% of injuries (reported by our sources) that removed soldiers from combat. Swords were the primary cavalry weapon, and produced over 40% of all wounds. Archery fire produced approximately 10% of all wounds, while warhorses are implicated in 6% of recorded injuries. The remaining injuries (about

24%) are from artillery, minor weapons, or unspecified sources. Lances caused most serious and mortal wounds to the torso, while swords produced most of the head injuries. Swords also frequently damaged arms, but these wounds were seldom fatal. Legs are seldom wounded by any mechanism—sword, lance, or mace—and many of our recorded injuries came from archery fire.

When analyzing these findings, we should keep in mind the nature of medieval combat. The torso was the most effective target for a lancer, who was simultaneously maneuvering a tossing mount and aiming at a warrior who had similar problems and goals. Sword strikes were delivered to the head and upper body because cavalymen lifted themselves up in their stirrups to give greater leverage and force to their blows. The large number of these wounds described by our sources should be attributed to the fact that sword fighting comprised the vast majority of time spent in hand-to-hand combat. Archery-fire was more random and injured the areas of the body unprotected by mail and scaled armor: the arms, legs, and face.

Byzantine armored cavalry were the most likely to be killed by swords or lances, and to be injured by falls from horses or from chance strikes to the arms or body. Despite the presence of *iatroi* with the army, and despite evidence that medical supplies were carried with the imperial baggage train, there is no direct evidence that "military doctors" provided medical service to the common soldier. Indeed, even emperors seemed reluctant to make use of their services and preferred to treat themselves. Medical corpsmen are attested in our early sources, and later evidence indicates that the wounded were brought to camp and cared for, but only in the sense of protecting them from further enemy attack. Discharged wounded soldiers received extra pay for treatment when they reached home, but the nature of this treatment is not described.³¹ The *iatroi* and *asklepiadai* of our sources cared for emperors; common soldiers were retrieved by *depotatoi* (corpsmen), but then were responsible for their own treatment.

Byzantine soldiers fought side-by-side with their general officers; the military ethos of the time insisted that emperors display their bravery and physical prowess. It certainly required both courage and physical fortitude to campaign with a medieval army. Conditions on the march were often appalling. For the frontline soldier, battle

³¹ Choniates, *Historia*, 191.

commenced with a ferocious crush of lances, in which one fifth of one's comrades fell in the first few moments, and in which the sudden élan of the charge could instantaneously turn to into the panic and slaughter of a rout. If battle continued, hours of confused hammering with swords and maces offered further opportunity for injury. What our sources demonstrate is that type and seriousness of injury, rather than medical treatment, determined battlefield mortality. Effective medical treatment did not really exist for most soldiers. Nevertheless, the Byzantines recognized the value of rescuing injured or exhausted combatants and conveying them to camp, where their chances of survival and eventual return to action were far greater than would have been the case had they remained on the field of combat. It was on campaign, and in battle, more than in any other activities, that the emperor and his men became equals. In battle a stray arrow, or a lucky lance thrust (or a hunting accident) could kill even the best-protected soldier.

CONCLUSION

Alexios Komnenos developed an army that successfully fought Normans, Pechenegs, and Turks. The army he inherited in 1081 was a ragged and poorly trained force that had been ruined by a half century of neglect followed by ten years of civil war. Alexios' reform of this army primarily consisted of its retraining. Alexios' wars were mainly defensive; he neither waged aggressive campaigns of reconquest (his occupation of many Asia Minor territories in the wake of the first crusade notwithstanding), nor did he conduct many sieges. The army became seasoned by battle against the Normans and Pechenegs, and by his death in 1118, after thirty-five years of campaigning, it was a disciplined and effective military force.

John II inherited a professional army and an empire that finally had stable borders after forty years of constant warfare. John developed fortified points along the south coast of Asia Minor, and campaigned in northern and southeastern Anatolia. His campaigns were characterized by aggressive sieges followed by defensive military actions. He avoided open battle wherever possible, preferring to rely upon the Byzantine army's superb siege and engineering skills. His goals were to contain the Danishmendids in northern Anatolia, and to secure Byzantine control of Antioch—his military activity in Cilicia and Syria was directed toward this goal. John was unable to take and garrison the city of Antioch and he had to settle with forcing the Antiochene princes into partial submission.

Manuel conducted an aggressive eastern policy in an attempt to control Antioch and the other crusading states of the Levant. He was willing to expend considerable resources, for example, in an attempt to relieve pressure on the Kingdom of Jerusalem by attacking Egypt with a large fleet. Unlike John, Manuel's army fought many field battles, and engaged in or planned sieges (Kerkyra, Zeugminon, Ikonion), more sporadically. Manuel's military and diplomatic efforts met with mixed success; his long wars against Hungary resulted in an ephemeral influence, while the huge expenditures on expeditions to Italy, Antioch, and against the Seljuks brought the Byzantine empire no appreciable increase in military security or extension of territory. Manuel's elaborate and expensive campaigns created the

illusion of a vibrant and militarily capable state, but they masked important weaknesses. Byzantium's army was increasingly equipped and maintained like a western European army, but without a reliable method for paying and supplying the troops. Manuel's expedient of paying his soldiers with *pronoia* did not provide his successors with a ready source of proficient and loyal men. In 1177 the empire was able to parry Seljuk attacks with a core of soldiers sent from the capital, supplemented by levies from Nicomedia and the Neokastra *theme*; this system did not long survive the Komnenian dynasty.

The armies of the Komnenian emperors consisted of three major types of soldiers. First, the emperors maintained guard units in Constantinople. These at first included the *Exkoubitoi*, the Immortals, and the Varangians. The Norman wars destroyed most of these units, and in the later wars of Alexios, and in John and Manuel's reigns, the only guard unit that appears is the Varangians. These men were English foot soldiers, heavily armored, and they were more than a palace corps d'élite; they guarded the emperor in Constantinople (where they tried to deny John II access to the imperial palace while Alexios lay dying), but they also fought against the Normans at Dyrrachion, and won John's 1122 battle against the Pechenegs. Alexios used the *Archontopouloi* (sons of veterans) in battle, but they disappear from our sources after his reign. They were likely a training corps for young officers, pressed into active service during an emergency.

The second source of Komnenian manpower was troops levied from the native population of Byzantine provinces. During Alexios' reign these men were drawn from Thrace, and Macedonia (and occasionally Thessaly), which were near the capital and could provide men in a hurry. This was simple expediency; troops levied from further away could not respond quickly enough for emergencies particularly for campaigns against the Pechenegs and Cumans, who would raid and retreat almost before Alexios could gather his men. John's reign provides less information about troops of this type, although Macedonians are mentioned when the emperor campaigns in Syria. Manuel's reign offers more definitive descriptions: he levied troops from Thrace, Macedonia, Thessalonike, as well as from the Nicomedia and Neokastra regions in Asia Minor. Included in this category are the Pechenegs settled at Moglena (north of Thessalonike), and the Serbian levies settled near Nicomedia. Other mentions of local levies appear in Seleukeia (on the Anatolian coast south

of Cilicia), and in Dalmatia. Notably, these were frontier regions that could be expected to have to provide for their own defense against raids.

The third source of soldiers was mercenaries. These continued to come from the west (Italians, Germans, French and Normans), and from the east (Turks, Alans, Georgians). Western mercenaries (all cavalry) performed the functions of shock troops—heavy cavalry, in all three reigns. The eastern mercenaries, as well as the Pechenegs (who were from Europe), were also common to the three reigns. These soldiers were lighter-armed, and served as scouts, raiders, and mounted archers. Some of these men were settled within Byzantine territory, and thereupon functioned in all respects like levies, while others continued to be recruited from outside of the empire.

A fourth category of soldiers, defined by function rather than by source (since we do not know where they were from), were the artillerymen, who served the siege engines, and who accounted for most of John II's victories. These men are mentioned by historians and by the orators of the Komnenian period; unfortunately, the historians devote much time to the few major field battles the emperors fought, and little time to describing the activities of the men who made most of the Byzantine territorial gains in Asia Minor. The three previous categories of men, the Guards, the Levies, the Mercenaries, certainly existed to prevent enemy armies from ravaging Komnenian territory. But, in aggressive campaigns, particularly those of John II, these three groups existed to protect the siege engines and the men who operated them. At Anazarbos, at Kerkyra, at Tarsus, Kastamon, Gangra, Zeugminon, Adana, and throughout Syria, these men and the trebuchets they manned were the decisive element in each campaign. The army's failure to protect them and transport them to Iconion in 1176 meant the failure of that campaign. Manuel's field actions and extensive campaigns with large cavalry armies accomplished less than John's more limited actions, which relied upon these men and their machines.

The Komnenian defensive system in Asia Minor was characterized by control of the fertile river-valleys of the peninsula's western quarter, and by control of a narrow coastal strip in other areas. Even after the restoration of many regions in the wake of the First Crusade, the empire remained on the strategic defensive. John extended the imperial border in northern and eastern Anatolia, but also relied upon using the Danishmendids and the Seljuks against each other.

When Danishmendid power collapsed during Manuel's reign, he was forced to contend with a unified Turkish state that controlled most of the Asia Minor interior. Nevertheless, fighting was usually a last resort for Byzantine armies. The Byzantine fleet appears several times in our sources; when John conducted a war against the Venetians, when Manuel attacked Damietta in Egypt, and when Manuel confiscated Venetian property in 1171. But the naval power of the Italian merchant states, particularly of Venice, meant that the Byzantine fleet was never again able to dominate the Aegean and Ionian Seas, let alone the eastern Mediterranean. Unlike the defensive system of the Macedonian emperors, the Komnenian system was not resilient. The Komnenian *themes* were smaller than their tenth century predecessors, and militarily less self-sufficient. Emperors raised armies that could challenge the Seljuk sultans, but the *themes* were not able to stop Turkoman raiders from pillaging the Byzantine borderlands.

With respect to financial problems, the best that can be said is that the Komnenian emperors found methods of providing for their soldiers, and these methods became increasingly sophisticated. Alexios had to rely upon temporary expedients to obtain cash; John and Manuel had more stable provinces, and were able to maintain and pay their men with greater consistency. They were also able to muster armies equal to those of their most capable foes. However, the Komnenian emperors did not ever rely upon a single source of manpower, or a single method of financing their soldiers, and part of the difficulty experienced by the emperors after Manuel was that the Komnenian support structure was not systematic. This system relied upon the loyalty and support of local provincial leaders, and emperors who could not dominate their local *Doux* found themselves without men and money.

Much blame has been laid at Manuel's feet for developing an ambitious foreign policy that strained the empire's finances and offered little practical return in terms of additional territories and military security. In other words, Manuel pursued a foreign policy that gained ephemeral political victories, but that was otherwise fruitless. This analysis is supported by an examination of the military events of Manuel's reign. Manuel engaged in ambitious projects in the east, west, and north, and none of them added to the empire's security or prosperity.

Nevertheless, while Manuel's wars did not provide a secure basis for military defense in subsequent reigns, commercial prosperity

increased dramatically. This did not mean that the emperors received increased tax revenues; local wealth meant that local potentates were better able to resist the exactions of a central government, if that government was weak. The social policy of Andronikos I Komnenos (1183-1185), placed him at odds with his own family, and fragmented the family-centered system created by Alexios. Isaac II Angelos (1185-95, 1203-04) could not repair this damage, and his high-handedness resulted in a myriad of rebellions. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Serbia, and Cilicia permanently passed from imperial control, and the empire was unable to rely upon *Hellas* or its far-flung provinces in northern and eastern Anatolia for money or men. The empire lacked the political unity from which Alexios profited upon taking the throne in 1081; after 1195 it possessed little more territory than it had in 1081. Finally, all of this took place in an external political environment that was vastly more complex than the one Alexios had faced upon his accession.

A detailed discussion of what happened to the army and the political economy of the Komnenian *oikos* after 1185 would be the subject of another study. However, we should not forget that the development and employment of the Komnenian military system resulted from the activities of three proactive emperors, who spent considerable time and money reconstructing the empire's eastern frontier, and defending the empire on other military fronts. Whether Manuel's military policy was as successful as John's, or not, Manuel fortified western Asia Minor, and campaigned with the hope of protecting the empire from further Turkish, Hungarian and Norman incursions. He was extremely gentle with his family members, even when they committed treason. He appeared to have a finely tuned sense of balance in the way he handled the scores of important people who wanted military and political appointments. When one, like Alexios Axouch, became too powerful, Manuel deposed him—but this was rare. In short, the Komnenian military (and political) system required strong personal leadership, and direct intervention by the ruler in military, fiscal, and political matters. When this control disappeared, the system, and its army, collapsed.

APPENDIX 1

SIEGES IN JOHN II AND MANUEL I'S REIGNS

<i>John II</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Siege(S) Fortification(F), Defense (D)</i>
Laodikeia	Thrakesion	D
Sozopolis	Pamphylia	S
Hierakokoryphitos		S
Branicevo	Branicevo	D
Zeugminon	Branicevo	S
Kastamon: 4 times	Paphlagonia	S
Rhyndakos		F
Gangra: 2 times	Paphlagonia	S
Gangra	Paphlagonia	D
Adana	Cilicia	S
Tarsus	Cilicia	S
Baka	Cilicia	S
Anazarbos	Cilicia	S
Piza	Syria	S
Halep	Syria	S
Ferep	Syria	S
Kafartab	Syria	S
Shaizar	Syria	S
Neokaisareia	Pontus	S
Attaleia	Pamphylia	F
Pougouse	Thrakesion	S

<i>Manuel I</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Siege(S) Fortification(F), Defense (D)</i>
Prakana	Pamphylia	S
Pithekas	Thrakesion	D
Ikonion	Ikonion	S
Constantinople		F
Monemvasia	Hellas	D
Thebes	Hellas	D
Corinth	Hellas	D

Table (cont.)

<i>Manuel I</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Siege(S)</i> <i>Fortification(F)</i> <i>Defense (D)</i>
Kerkyra	Epiros	S
Bari	Italy	F
Zeugminon	Branicevo	F
Brindisi	Italy	S
Pentapolis		S
Laodikeia	Thrakesion	D
Zeugminon	Branicevo	D
Zeugminon	Branicevo	S
Chiliara	Neokastra	F
Pergamon	Neokastra	F
Atramyttion	Neokastra	F
Damietta	Egypt	S
Euboia	Aegeam	D
Chios	Aegean	D
Dorylaion	Opsikion/Malagina	F
Soublaion	Thrakesion	F
Amaseia	Pontus	S
Ikonion	Ikonion	S
Tralles	Maeander	D
Antioch in Pisidia	Maeander	D
Louma	Maeander	D
Pentacheir	Maeander	D
Claudiopolis	Paphlagonia	D

APPENDIX 2

GLOSSARY

Alans: A people from the Caucasus Mountains, with whom the Byzantines had diplomatic contact. Maria 'of Alania' was empress from 1071/3–1081. Alan mercenaries served with the Byzantine army, and are mentioned in 1077 fighting for Manuel against the Turks.

Aplekta: Tenth-century imperial supply points and campaign staging centers; they were *Malagina*, *Dorylaion*, *Kaborkin*, *Koloneia*, *Kaisareia*, and *Dazimon*.

Apulia: The Byzantine term for that portion of Italy which was closest to Byzantine territory in the Balkans, including the city of Bari.

Bogomils: A dualist sect founded in Bulgaria in the tenth century, that then spread across the Balkans. They were peaceable, but Alexios I suppressed them when they began to find converts among the nobility.

Caesar: A high imperial title that ranked right after *Basileus* (Emperor). Under the Komnenoi this title was downgraded, ranking after the *Sebastokrator* (frequently the emperor's brother).

Caltrops: Four-pronged metal implements constructed so that when they were thrown on the ground one sharpened prong always pointed upward. They were used in battle against cavalry.

Chrysobull: An Imperial document, treaty, or decree that granted rights or privileges, and confirmed agreements. It was sealed in gold, and the emperor's signature was in purple ink.

Cumans: A mounted people who controlled the territory north of the Danube River and northeast into the central Ukraine. They replaced the Pechenegs as a threat to, (and sometimes ally of) the Byzantine state. During the Komnenian period they were first Pecheneg allies, then Alexios' allies; they were eventually subjugated by the Mongols (1222–37).

Dacians: A Byzantine name for Hungarians.

Danishmendids: The Danishmendids were a Turkish state in northern and northeastern Asia Minor. During the reign of John II they were militarily more active than the Seljuks, and John spent many campaign seasons attempting to contain them. Dynastic struggles weakened them during Manuel's reign.

Doux: An Imperial title under the Komnenoi which conferred military and political control of a region upon an official; it was frequently applied to frontier or endangered regions, such as Dyrrachion, or Seleukeia.

Dynatoi: 'The powerful'; landowners or other powerful Byzantine officials, usually in the provinces.

Echelon Casualty Management: The modern military medical principal that evaluates an injured soldier and recommends a certain level of treatment facility based upon the seriousness of the injury.

Exkoubitoi: A corps of select imperial guards. They disappear from our military descriptions after Alexios I.

Grand Domestic (*Megas domestikos*): Commander in chief of the Byzantine armies, also corresponding to the Domestic of the Scholae.

Grand Logothete: A high judicial official under the Komnenoi.

Huscarles: Heavily armed infantry; with reference to the Byzantine army, after 1066 the Varangian Guard were huscarles recruited from Britain.

Kataphraktos: The Byzantine heavy cavalry. In the beginning of the Komnenian period (Alexios I), they were of noticeably lesser quality than their western foes. By the end (Manuel I), they were similarly armed and equipped, and were comparable to the best western cavalry.

Kelts: A Byzantine expression for westerners, in particular Franks or Normans.

Latins: A generic Byzantine expression for everyone who practiced western Christianity.

Manzikert (1071), Battle of: Romanos IV Diogenes was defeated by the Seljuk Sultan Alp-Arslan; the Byzantine army was destroyed, and the Seljuks flooded Asia Minor with settlers.

Mt. Lebounion (1091), Battle of: Alexios I, leading a coalition of Cumans and Byzantines, defeated the Pecheneg army. A special feast day was celebrated in Constantinople to commemorate this victory. Pechenegs were enrolled in the Byzantine army, and did not substantially trouble the empire again until 1122.

Myriokephalon (1176), Battle of: Manuel I led a Byzantine army of possibly forty thousand men into central Asia Minor, where dysentery, heat and poor scouting resulted in its defeat. This ended Byzantine attempts to destroy the Seljuk Turks.

Nomos georgikos: Eighty-five articles governing the relations of cultivators to each other. Our earliest manuscripts date to the eleventh century.

Oikos: Literally, 'house.' In the Komnenian context, the imperial *oikos* was vastly expanded through marriage alliances, and became the primary instrument for governing the provinces.

Paristrion Region: the region just south of the Danube, corresponding today to northern Bulgaria. This region was subject to constant invasion and raiding during the reigns of Alexios I and John II.

Paroikoi: Dependent peasants who nonetheless retained their ability to leave the land they cultivated, and who sometimes obtained control over that

land. They usually paid a rent, either to the state treasury or to a landlord.

Paulicians: A sect that originated in Armenia, in the Komnenian era there was a settlement of Paulicians near Philippopolis. They were dualists, like the Bogomils, but unlike the Bogomils, the Paulicians were very warlike.

Pechenegs: Also known as the Patzinaks, the Pechenegs were Byzantine allies and sometimes foes from the ninth until the thirteenth centuries. They were a mounted steppe people, and in the reign of Alexios I they raided deep into Thrace, fighting several battles with that emperor. They were defeated at Mt. Lebounion in 1091, (by Alexios), and again by John II in 1122. Pechenegs were settled as military colonists northwest of Thessalonike.

Peltasts: Light-armed infantry with both melee and missile weapons. They are referred to as 'assault troops' in Byzantine military manuals. They were used for flanking operations, skirmishing, and to drive off enemy cavalry.

Pronoia: From the twelfth century, the tax revenues from a group of properties. These were usually used to support a soldier. *Pronoia* differed from a western European feudal fief in that it was not hereditary, and involved no transfer of land. *Pronoia* was just the tax receipts from land, mills, and other sources. These revenue sources might or might not be near the home of the person supported by the *pronoia*.

Psiloi: Archers, slingers, and other lightly armed skirmishers; these soldiers wore little armor, and usually carried only missile weapons.

Rhomaioi: Literally 'Romans.' The Byzantines called themselves *Rhomaioi*, and their empire the Roman Empire. The word 'Byzantine' is a later introduction of historians.

Scholae: Imperial guard military unit, stationed in Constantinople, and under the command of the Domestic of the Scholae.

Scyths: A Byzantine name that referred to all of the mounted peoples who lived north of the Danube River, and also those who lived north of the Black Sea. In the Komnenian era, it usually referred to Pechenegs, or Cumans.

Sebastokrator: Komnenian composite title formed from Sebastos (brother), and Autokrator (ruler), usually given to the emperor's sons or brothers.

Seljuk Turks: The Turkish state that at its height controlled not only Asia Minor, but also controlled most of modern day Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The western portion of this state became independent under the Seljuk Sultans of Ikonion.

Semlin (1167), Battle of: A Byzantine army of approximately fifteen thousand men met a Hungarian force of roughly equal number. In a battle that lasted many hours, the Byzantines were eventually victorious.

Strateia: The obligation to serve in the army, or to support a soldier; the meaning is debatable, and appears to constantly change.

Stratevomenos: The actual fighting service, performed by a soldier either as the result of his obligation as a *stratiotes*, or for a *stratiotes*.

Stratiotes: The holder of land owing a military obligation.

Synone: From the sixth century, the compulsory purchase of foodstuffs. Eventually this took on the meaning of regular state imposts on land.

Tagma: Also known as *bandon*, the word *tagma* was synonymous with the word 'unit' in Byzantine terminology. It could be rendered as 'battalion,' or 'regiment,' depending upon the size of the forces involved.

Tagmata: The *tagmata* were the guard units of the capital, regularly maintained by the emperor, and always available for campaigning. The importance of these units declined in the decades after the Battle of Manzikert (1071).

Themata: The *themata* were the provincial military units stationed in the *themes*. These soldiers were locally raised and supported, and functioned as a militia that was available to repel raids and invasions that did not require the intervention of the imperial army of the capital (the *tagmata*).

Theme: The *themes* were the basic governmental unit in the Byzantine Empire from the eighth century (some historians say they were developed as early as the emperor Heraklios, in the seventh century), until the decades after the battle of Manzikert (1071). The Asiatic *themes* provided the bulk of the non-*tagmatic* soldiers for the imperial army until this period. Themes survived into the Komnenian period, (*themes* of Neokastron, Moglena), but the Komnenian method of governing through family members tended to reduce their importance.

Turkomans: Tribesmen who poured into Asia Minor in the aftermath of the battle of Manzikert (1071). They were independent of Seljuk Turkish control, and raided Byzantine territory even when the Seljuks were at peace with the empire.

Typikon: a monastic *typikon* was a rule of governance for a monastery, usually written down by the monastery's founder. It could also include lists of monastic property and exemptions, as well as information about the food and dress of monks.

Varangian Guard: The Varangian Guard was the emperor's personal bodyguard in the Komnenian period. They were also used in major battles, at Dyrrachion (1081), and by John II against the Pechenegs (1122). Before 1066 they had been composed mainly of Russians from Kiev, but after 1066, when the Cumans and Pechenegs made travel north difficult, the guard became composed of English soldiers fleeing the Norman conquest of England.

APPENDIX 3

CHRONOLOGY OF BYZANTINE HISTORIANS

Komnenian and Angelid Emperors

Emperor	Romanos IV Diogenes	Michael VII Doukas	Michael VII Doukas	Nikephoros Botaneiates	Alexios I Komnenian	John II Komnenian	Manual Alexios I Komnenian	Andronikos I Angelos	Isaac II Angelos	Alexios III Angelos	Isaac II & Alexios III Angelos
Regnal Dates	1068-71	1071-78	1078-81	1081-1118	1118-43	1143-80	1180-83	1183-85	1185-95	1195-1203	1203-1204
<i>Historian</i>											
Michael Psellos	1018			ca. 1081?							
Michael Attaleiates		ca. 1020-30		> 1085							
Nikephoros Bryennios		ca. 1064		1136/7							
Anna Komnene			1083			1153/4					
John Zonaras						1159?					
Niketas Choniates				1155-57							1217
John Kinnamos				<1143					>1185		
Eusebios of Thessalonike				ca. 1115						1195/6	
Theodore Prodromos				ca. 1110							ca. 1170

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